BEM

No.24

THE COMICS NEWS FANZINE 30p

july

BILL MANTLO TALKS ABOUT THE MICRONAUTS

CE3K by Pete Scott

NEWS

strips

MORE

BEM-24 July 1979

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NEW READERS START HERE...

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news at Bem

Postal cost rises. Photography cost rises. Printing cost rises. A rise in the cost of milk, come to that--but now the one you've all been waiting for, this year's Grand Bem Price Rise! Yes, Bem-25, due out in mid-August, will have a cover price of 45 pence.

Now that's a large price increase; a 5p or 10p rise could have been enough, at least for the moment, if Bem was just going to continue in the same way as before, but the time has come to start to go over to typesetting. Now, this is expensive; it costs as much to typeset a page as it does to print the darn thing, so even at 45p Bem is going to be even more non profit-making than before (sigh...), but it does have some very useful advantages. First of all, it looks better than typewriting, with firmer printing and a more professional effect generally; secondly, it allows more text to be fitted on a page without resorting to extra-high reduction (like the 50% reduction we had to use for Reaction this time), as the width of the various letters can vary, instead of an 'i' taking up as much room as a 'w'; and thirdly, it reduces the work-load of Bem's editor, as no longer will I have to type page after page of these carefully-prepared, justified columns. Let's see how it goes -- but if things work out in practise the way they ought to, this time-saving might even mean that Bem could finally move up to a bi-monthly schedule.

So, let's see how it goes; I feel that Bem will remain very good value at its new price, and it certainly won't be the most expensive fanzine on the market. However, if you don't fancy spending more than 30p a go for Bem, you can still subscribe at the old rate of £1.50 for five issues until September 2nd, when Comicon 79 ends; from Monday 3rd September Bem will be 45p a copy by post, or £3.00 for seven issues, which saves 15 pence on the price of seven individual issues.

This time, Bill Mantlo has become the major contributor to Bem; not only did he kindly agree to be interviewed, to tell us all how he came to be a comics writer and, in particular, how he turned a line of toys into one of the most popular comics now being published, but he also provided some excellent art. On Bem's front cover is an unused cover for MICRONAUTS #1, by Mike Golden; page 8 shows the cover for MICRONAUTS #9, before the title logo was added across the top; and you'll also notice a fine pair of illustrations featuring Bill's latest character, ROM. So, my thanks to Bill for his invaluable assistance... I'd also like to thank Captain Frog for the loan of his Frogjet for the trans-Atlantic journey to interview Bill, but I'm still too dizzy...

Also along this time is Pete Scott's retrospective on Close Encounters of the Third Kind, a film you may well have heard of concerning flying saucers who like racing police cars -- illustrated on what became in the end a very tight deadline by Russ Nicholson, who also demonstrates his versatility in a couple of other places around Bem. Of course, he's got some stiff competition here, with such gentlemen as Brian Bolland, Nick Neocleous, New Zealand's Colin Wilson, the multi-talented Pete Scott, Terry Moore, Hunt Emerson, Luke Rainford, and Mike Matthews also within these pages...and that's not a full list by any means!

Stop looking at the picture, and come back to the editorial! The more perspicacious among you may recognise the coat, by the way, which Brian assures me does exist; it made a guest appearance in the Judge Cal epic in 2000 A.D. a few months ago.

And what of Bem-25? I've got in front of me a 7-page sort of superhero, sort of science fiction, kind of funny strip by Eddie Campbell (script and pencils) and Dave Harwood (inks), which will be on board; Dave has also completed for us a 4-page SF tale, starting what should be a regular series--but more on the background to that next time! Yes, Bem-25 should have a good amount of top-quality strip material; it will also have the usual features, including the full news service, Reaction, Fan-Things, and so on, and be out in time for Comicon 79 at the end of August. There won't be a Review Section, however, but Reaction is just waiting for your letters, so don't delay if you want to join in the debates raging there.

One of the big draw-backs to the Bem price increase from my point of view, or the main plus point if you're a subscriber, is that it increases the value of outstanding subscriptions by 50%; however, I'd much rather reward the Bem subscribers by giving them bigger, better Bems for the money they've already sent in, than penalise them by cutting back the length of subscriptions. After all, subscribers are the back-bone of any fanzine, and should be nurtured, encouraged and rewarded!

And may I direct your attention to the bit in the small print on the left about Bem back issues? At the moment Bem-12 and Bem-14 on are still available, so it's a fine time to fill in any gaps in your Bem collection before the postal charges rise--or buy all eleven of the little darlings, increase your collection by over 250 pages. It's an unrepeatable offer, chums, as I'm running low on a couple of those issues now...

One of the main rewards of publishing Bem is all the helpful people in the comics industry who give this magazine their support, with news, artwork, letters, and time. Bill Mantlo I've already mentioned--but people like Steve McManus of 2000 A.D., Mike Gold, Frank Thorne, James Van Hise, Jack C. Harris, Richard Burton of Tornado, and others give Bem invaluable assistance. Thanks, everyone... -ML

comics news

"ROM" is a new monthly comic based on a line of toys sold by Parker Brothers, the games-makers. The series was developed by Bill Mantlo, with preliminary sketches by John Romita jr and character designs by Keith Giffen and Dave Cockrum. Bill will be scripting the series, with Sal Buscema on art and as editor Mary Jo Duffy--see the splash page here, and also on page 10 one of the presentation pictures. According to some reports, this tie-in was the toy company's idea, and they are actually paying Marvel to produce the book because of the merchandising boost it will give the character.

It appears that Marv Wolfman and Roy Thomas will not continue as editors when their contracts come up for renewal -- evidently Jim Shooter is moving away from the writer/editor concept. At the moment it is not clear if either will stay with Marvel purely as writers, despite their wishes to stay in control of Dracula and Conan respectively; contrary to popular belief, DC could hire them, as DC have been expanding again of late, but DC is opposed to writer/editor too, although they do have some characters that both Roy and Marv would love to script...

After the first Spider-Man ("Mayhem in Manhattan" by Wein & Wolfman) and Hulk ("Stalker From The Stars" by Wein, Wolfman, & Joseph Silva) novels, the next books (after the second Hulk novel) are numbered as a series. #4 is Captain America in "Holocaust For Hire" by Joseph Silva (alias Ron Goulart); #5 has The Fantastic Four in "Doomsday" by Marv Wolfman; #6 stars Iron Man by William Rotsler; #7 presents Dr Strange by Rotsler; #8 brings a second novel with a certain wall-crawling web-slinger by Paul Kupperberg; #9 features short stories starring Hulk, Daredevil, The X-Men, and the Avengers; #10 has the Avengers solo, by David Michelinie; #11 was to have featured the Silver Surfer by William Rotsler; and #12 will team Spider-Man and the Hulk in "Murder Moon" by Paul Kupperberg. #11 has, it seems, been killed by Stan Lee after it was written. It was very well done--that wasn't the problem. Stan just continues to try to stop anybody else writing the Silver Surfer.

The Fantastic Four cartoon show, which featured work by Lee, Thomas and Kirby, has been cancelled; however, the Thing will occupy 30 minutes of the 90 minute "Godzilla Vs. The Shmoo and The Thing" show. In this incarnation, Blue-eyed Benjy plays a rock star (!) who runs around getting into adventures with five youthful fans. A Spider-Woman cartoon show is also scheduled, licensed by Marvel but totally unrelated to the comic.

ODYSSEY has changed its name to EPIC ILLUSTRATED. It should appear in early October; stories lined up include a new series by Jim Starlin, Silver Surfer by Stan Lee & John Buscema, "Siegfried & the Dragon" by Craig Russell, .. story by the Brothers Hildebrand, and work by Richard Corben, while other people who are expected to contribute include Frank Frazetta, Steranko, Ray Rue & Steve Bissette, Howard Chaykin, Tim Conrad, Arthur Suydam, Bob Larkin, Rick Veitch, and Doug Moench & Paul Gulacy, who are working on a series for the book.

The order of appearance for Marvel's annuals is:
MARVEL TWO-IN-ONE (Michelinie, Craig & Sinnott)
SPECTACULAR SPIDER-MAN (Mantlo & Buckler)
AMAZING SPIDER-MAN (Wolfman, Byrne & Austin--a 24-page story, plus 9 pages of pin-ups & features)
AVENGERS (Mantlo & Newton)
TARZAN (Mantlo, Sal Buscema & Sinnott)
FANTASTIC FOUR (Wolfman, Perez & Sinnott)
THOR (Thomas & Pollard)
X-MEN (Claremont, Perez & Austin)
HULK (Stern, Sal Buscema & Sinnott)
JOHN CARTER (Claremont, Weiss & deZuniga)
MARVEL TEAM-UP (or then again, maybe not...)
CONAN (Thomas, John Buscema & Chan)

Also to be slotted in (besides that double-sized INVADERS issue) are annuals for THE MICRONAUTS (by Mantlo & Golden) and STAR WARS (by Claremont & Mike Vosburg), the latter added to help Marvel USA to keep from falling too far behind Marvel UK in the printing of Star Wars material.

Stan Lee presents: THE GREATEST OF THE SPACE KNIGHTS--ROM!
THE COMET APPEARED OUT OF NOWHERE, CATCHING EARTH'S EARLY-WARNING SYSTEMS OFF-GUARD!
IF IT WAS A COMET!
RADAR TRACKED IT DOWN, LOSING IT FINALLY IN UNTIL THE LOWER ALTITUDES OVER WEST VIRGINIA!
A SEISMOGRAPH REGISTERED ITS IMPACT IN THE BLUE RIDGE MOUNTAINS! TOMORROW SOMEBODY FROM THE UNIVERSITY WILL INVESTIGATE...
...IF THERE IS A TOMORROW!
IT MAY BE TOO LATE!
THE CRATER GLOWS WHITE-HOT-- THE EARTH ITSELF HAS CRYSTALIZED FROM THE IMPACT! BUT THE ARMORED GIANT EMERGES UNSCATHED!
HE IS HERE!
ARRIVAL!

TARZAN and JOHN CARTER are cancelled, with #29 and #28 respectively; the annuals therefore end the alliance between Marvel and E.R.B., Inc. Apparently, TARZAN in particular was selling rather badly.

"Weirdworld" now takes up three MARVEL SUPER SPECIAL issues, starting with #11, out now. It is being advertised outside the Marvel line; MARVEL SPOTLIGHT will be printing a "prequel", which should change to a regular 40 cent comic. The first issue was drawn by Mike Ploog, followed by Pat Broderick.

SPIDER-MAN #200 is a 60 cent issue, in which the burglar from Spidey's origin makes a return appearance, and the plot problems caused by the death of Aunt May continue to effect Peter's life.

The first issue of the new DRACULA black & white magazine goes on sale in August, featuring a full length story by Wolfman, Colan & Bob McLeod. Steve Ditko has done a 34-page fill-in for Marv, concerning a Dimensional Man, whose body is being absorbed slowly into another astral plane as a result of a black magic rite -- and Colan & Palmer are re-united for a tale involving a character glimpsed in 4 or 5 panels in TOMB OF DRACULA #17--the story is stronger than could have been done within the Comics Code constraints.

MARVEL PREVIEW #18 & #20 feature Star-Lord, #19 Kull (by Thomas, Sal Buscema & deZuniga), and #21 Moon Knight (by Doug Moench & Bill Sienkiewicz) -- probably!

GHOST RIDER goes to monthly publication with #39.

MAN-THING, by Mike Fleisher & Jim Mooney, is scheduled to return on a bi-monthly schedule late this summer.

MARVEL SPOTLIGHT #3 ends the Captain Marvel story-line; #4 has the Ditko fill-in, while #5 is "Monster" by Wolfman & Ditko, and #6 spotlights the Iceman by Mary Jo Duffy and George Perez.

WHAT IF #17 is in 3 parts, asking What If Ghost Rider, Spider-Woman & Captain Marvel had remained villains. Steven Grant wrote it, Carmine Infantino pencilled it, and the 3 chapters were inked by Frank Springer, Mike Esposito and Pablo Marcos respectively.

HOWARD THE DUCK #1 (the new black & white) goes on sale in July, scripted by Bill Mantlo and drawn by Gene Colan & Dave Simmonds (the first story) and Mike Golden & Klaus Janson.

To aid sales, SPIDER-WOMAN #20 guest-stars SPIDER-MAN.

DEFENDERS #76 & 77, scripted by Steven Grant, concludes the plot threads left hanging when OMEGA THE UNKNOWN was cancelled two years ago.

THUNDERMOLE

IT MUST HAVE JUST LANDED IT WASN'T THERE YESTERDAY.

I WONDER WHAT THEY ARE.

GLOOP!

COME BACK MOLE, ITS A WONDERFUL EXPERIENCE

I KEEP GETTING FLASHES IN MY VISION.

HELP

WE'RE BEING INVADED BY PODS FROM OUTER SPACE

DEJA VU

POD!

THERES TWO IN HERE

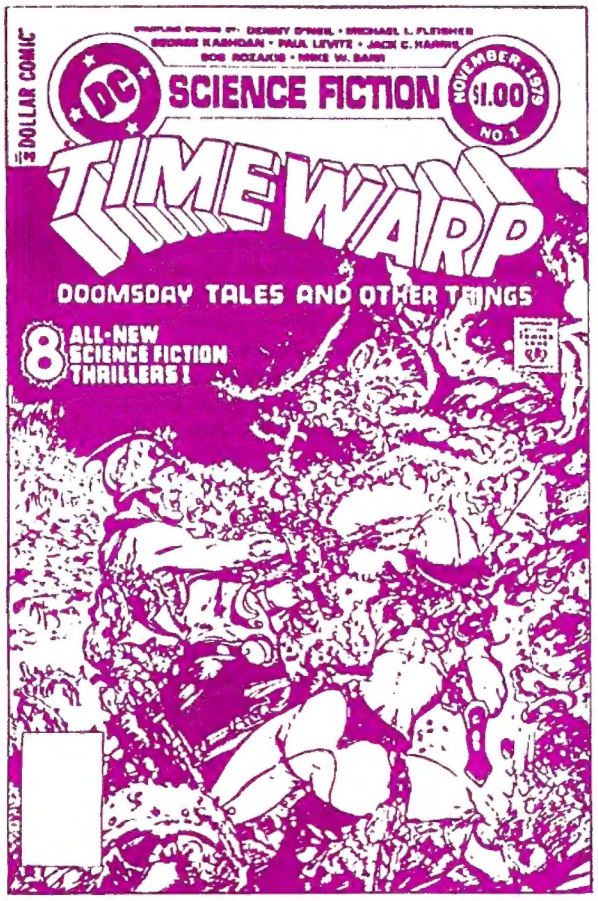
WE MUST DO SOMETHING!

RUN

HMM! THAT SEEMS TO HAVE WORKED FOR THE PRESENT, BUT AS A LONG TERM ELIMINATION PROJECT, IT DOES SEEM A LITTLE CRUDE.

DALE, YOU IN HERE?

LARRY MOORE



Three more DC-Marvel co-productions are set to appear over the next two years. The first is a second Superman/Spider-Man team-up, primarily written by Marv Wolfman with art by John Buscema & Joe Sinnott. Dr Doom is the Marvel villain for this story -- cameos by Wonder Woman and Hulk are planned, and the book should be out for Christmas. Next summer will come Hulk and Wonder Woman, mainly produced by DC; Len Wein and José Luis Garcia Lopez are the creative team assigned. And then for Christmas 1980 the most likely heroes to meet are Batman and Captain America...

The reconversion of WORLDS FINEST to the standard size, as of #259, won't be happening--it seems the book's sales have been picking up dramatically over the last few issues, so DC is going to leave well enough alone. The FIVE-STAR SUPER-HERO SPECTACULAR planned to replace it on the dollar book schedules won't be published.

ADVENTURE COMICS may soon go down to the small size instead; Paul Levitz is getting tired of the Justice Society, and Len Wein is getting a bit tired of Deadman. The stars of the 40c version are to be Plastic Man by Len Wein and Joe Staton, and Adam Strange by Len and, returning to DC from Marvel, Dave Cockrum.

Superboy is retiring from active service in the Legion after #258; and from the following issue the title of the book is just THE LEGION OF SUPER-HEROES. Superboy's solo series in the SUPERMAN FAMILY comic ends with #198. And THE NEW ADVENTURES OF SUPERBOY #1, from Julius Schwartz, Cary Bates, and Kurt Schaffenberger, ought to have a January or February 1980 cover-date.

A new LOIS LANE monthly might follow Superboy out of the Family title; so far, DC is resisting pressure to come out with Lois Lane, Jimmy Olsen and Supergirl titles again, but it won't be surprising if at least Lois breaks loose a few months before the release of the 2nd movie...if not sooner.

SUPERMAN FAMILY #200 will be a full length adventure, by Gerry Conway.

Don Heck will be the regular pencil artist on FLASH, with issue #280.

Steve Ditko is still doing some work for DC, as well as Marvel; including a Bouncing Boy/Duo Damsel back-up for S/LSH #257.

BRAVE & BOLD co-stars scheduled are (#156) Dr Fate, by Cary Burkett, Don Newton & Bob Smith; (#157) Kamandi, by Haney & Aparo; (#158) Wonder Woman, by Conway & Aparo; (#159) Ra's Al Ghul by O'Neil & Aparo.

DC COMICS PRESENTS has, joining the Man of Steel, these co-stars coming up: the Atom (in #16), Black Lightning (in #18), Firestorm (by Conway, taking up the story from the hero's book's cancellation), and Zatanna.

GREEN LANTERN #123, with a Gil Kane cover, marks the start of GL's solo adventures. It will be laid out by Joe Staton, with finished art by Dick Giordano. Sinestro, Carol Ferris and Thomas Kalmaku will all be returning; and GL proposes to Kari Limbo soon.

Mike W. Barr is leaving his post on staff to accept a job with Simulated Publications, Inc, publishers of rôle-playing war games, including Lord of the Rings and an upcoming John Carter of Mars game. Mike will be editorial assistant there; he plans to continue doing free-lance scripting for DC.

Mike Nasser has returned to DC and is doing a number of jobs. He has already completed a Mike Manhart story for HOUSE OF MYSTERY #276 (Jack C. Harris' first issue as editor, which also features a story by Len Wein & Steve Ditko). Nasser has finished a George Kashdan science fiction story which will probably appear in TIME WARP #2, and is currently drawing a 3-page mystery story scripted by Laurie Sutton (a Comics Code Authority employee). He has also drawn a Black Lightning story.

Dave Cockrum's first assignment on his return to DC was a 12-page Len Wein Green Lantern special, which should appear in ADVENTURE COMICS #467.

Paul Levitz is hard at work on his first book for Warner Publishing. "The Complete Guide to Comic Collecting" is due in both hardback and trade (oversize) paperback in Spring of 1980.

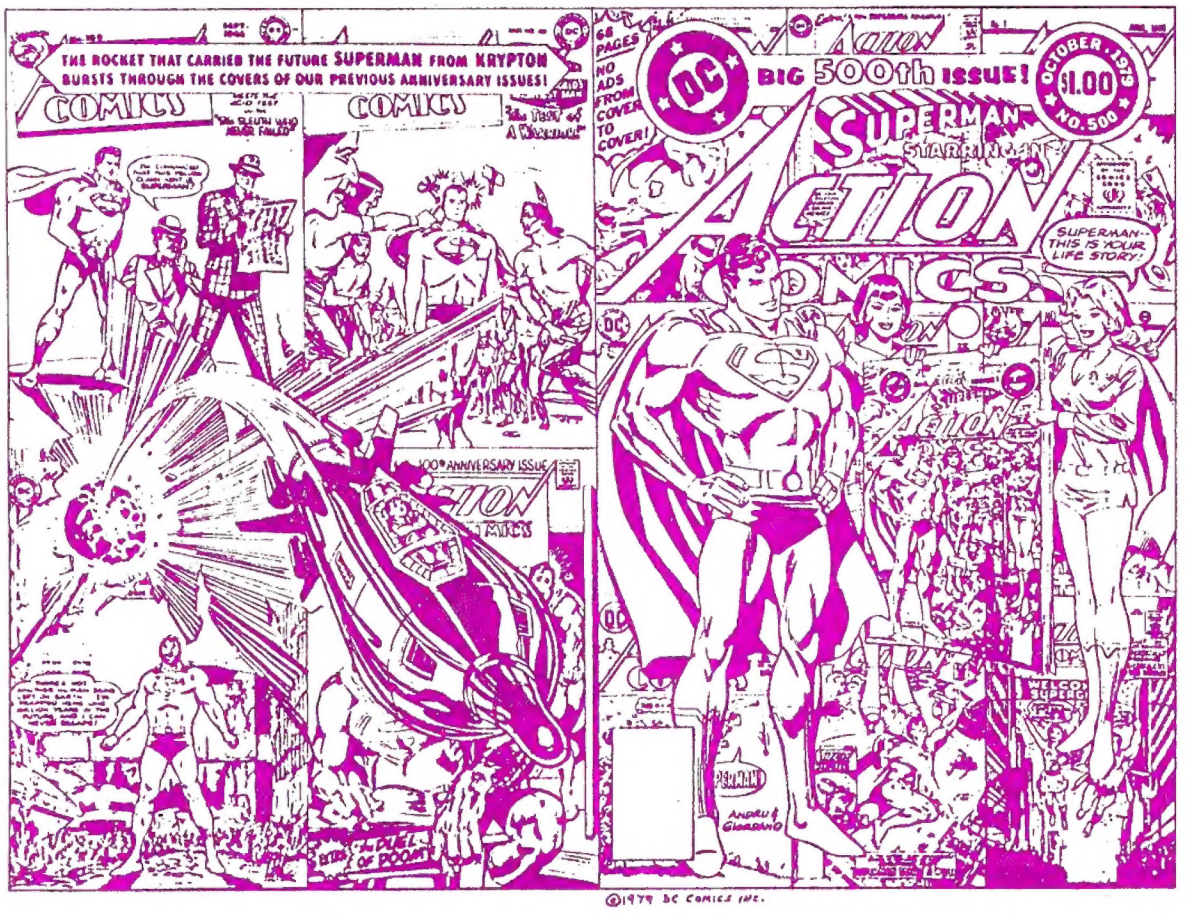
A special Hallowe'en issue of SUPERMAN by Len Wein pits the Man of Steel against the real Frankenstein Monster and Dracula. It seems that the thirsty Count wants some of Superman's blood so that he will be invulnerable, even from a wooden stake in the heart. How can these creatures exist? This issue reveals the answers.

THE SENSATIONAL SUPER-TEENS...
SUPERBOY
AND THE
LEGION OF SUPER-HEROES
40¢
NO 236
OCT.
HOLD THEM OFF-- WE CAN'T LET THE SCIENCE POLICE STOP US FROM RESTORING BRAINIAC 5'S SANITY! IF THEY DO -- THE LEGION IS DOOMED!
SECRETS NEVER BEFORE REVEALED IN-- "THIS IS YOUR LIFE--AND DEATH--BRAINIAC 5"!

SECRET ORIGINS OF SUPER-HEROES DIGEST will feature a new 10-page origin of Wonder Woman by Cary Burkett & José Delbo. Reprinted origins are of Robin (from Giant Batman 213), Supergirl (from Action 252), Aquaman (from Adventure 260), Hawkman (from Brave & Bold 43), Elongated Man (from Flash 112), the Legion of Super-Heroes (from Superboy 172), and the Batman/Superman team (from Worlds Finest 94).

SWAMP THING, which was slated for a revival, has been shelved again. Martin Pasko couldn't find time to write it--if DC couldn't do the job properly, they would rather leave Swampy in peace.

Upcoming in DETECTIVE COMICS is a new feature called "Tales of Gotham City" by O'Neil, reintroducing straight detective fiction to this book. Also, in a fill-in by Cary Burkett, the Spook returns to fight against Batman. BATMAN #320 uses a 1972 Wrightson cover, not previously published; #321 features the Joker, with layouts by Walt Simonson.



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2000 A.D. rises from ten to twelve pence per issue with prog 123, out on Saturday 21st July; there are no plans at the moment for TORNADO to follow.

Prog 119, however, sees more basic changes. Cover-featured is James Bond, for a photo-feature on the new Bond film, "Moonraker". The first part of a pull-out "Ro-Jaws and Hammerstein's Book of Robots" is enclosed--it has a Brian Bolland cover, and builds up over 4 weeks into a 16-page, half-size book. There's a competition, with 25 Corgi X-Ploratron sets to be won.

Two new stories start that week. In "Disaster 1990", Bill Savage returns, in adventures taking place before the "Invasion" series that started back in 2000 A.D. prog 1. In 1990, Britain is swamped by tidal waves--and the fight for survival is on. The scripter is Gerry Finley-Day, the artist is Carlos Pino. "Project Overkill", written by Kelvin Gosnell, is a mystery story, set in 1979 but with an SF twist. The first two episodes were drawn by Ian Gibson, who is then followed by Jesus Redondo from "Mind Wars".

Judge Dredd continues, unaffected; Dan Dare returns to Earth in prog 119. Strontium Dog and Rick Random conclude in prog 118--and Ro-Busters is caught in the change, going back to the time Hammerstein was a war robot (as shown previously in his war memoirs), with the strip retitled "The ABC Warrior". This strip will begin in colour in the centre pages; the artists remain O'Neill and McMahon.

With these changes, the emphasis in 2000 A.D. is moved away from pure science fiction towards adventure; while the last few months have been a "golden age" for 2000 A.D. in many ways, apparently sales and regular reader reaction call for a change in approach.

In development for 2000 A.D., according to CMNI, is a strip adaptation of Harry Harrison's famous SF series featuring "The Stainless Steel Rat". No date for the strip's debut has yet been given.

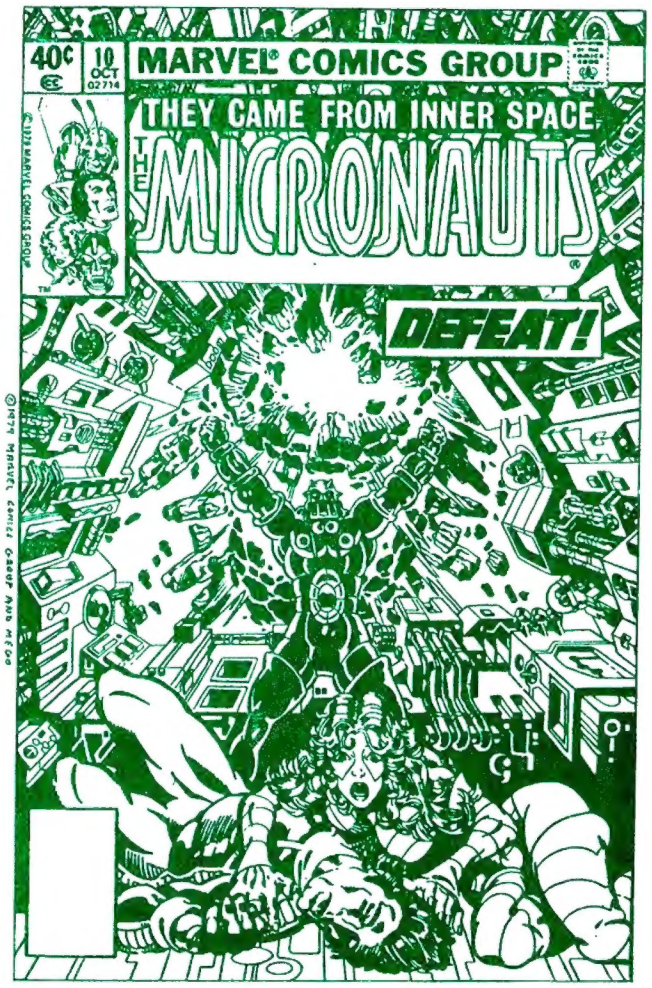
TORNADO has settled into its regular routine now, with Dave Hunt (who also is in charge of BATTLE-ACTION) as editor, Roy Preston (who used to work with Nick Landau on 2000 A.D.) as assistant editor, and Richard Burton as sub-editor. The current "Write a story round the cover" competition ends with #19, when instead the covers once again feature the main characters--#20 for instance highlights two not dissimilar characters, Captain Klep and Big E. Captain Klep is a very popular feature, and is continuing.

Wagner's Walk reaches its natural conclusion in Tornado #19.

Victor Drago is alternating between text stories and strip material, to see which is preferred. Issues 14-16 are in strip form, issues 17-19 text again.

Black Hawk moves out of the centre, colour slot after #19; the next 4 issues feature there colour spreads by Brian Bolland featuring the main characters of the comic, two at a time; the last of these has Black Hawk, and also the main two characters of a new strip starting in issue #24..."Mars Force".

"The Angry Planet" ends in #22; "Mars Force" is a sequel series, set 50 years further in the future. The artist is still Belardinelli, following designs of the two main characters done by Brian Bolland, while the scripter is Richard Burton. In an exclusive telephone interview, Richard was kind enough to give us details about this, his first major strip series; it features two heroes, one from Earth (Mike Armstrong) and one from Mars (Scott Redman), and Richard describes it as "Securicor in Space", as our heroes protect convoys in deep space from such menaces as pirates. When asked if these futuristic pirates might still sport the occasional parrot on the shoulder, Richard chuckled, and changed the subject...



Over at Marvel UK, changes are being made in HULK COMIC. The Nick Fury series ends in #19; Steve Moore and Steve Dillon move straight away to a new-material Ant-Man series starting in #20, set straight after the reprints the comic has been printing, and before Henry Pym met Janet Van Dyne. He will have powers he did not display after he met her, though--he can enlarge and shrink things other than himself, and gains two new ant steeds, called Trigger and Silver, and also a modified costume, with gauntlets and a revised chest emblem.

ALL NEW SUPER-HERO ACTION!
• SUPERMAN • BATMAN • GREEN ARROW
HAWKMAN • BLACK LIGHTNING • SHAZAM!
4 FULL-LENGTH FEATURES!
NOVEMBER 1978
$1.00
NO. 259
WORLD'S FINEST
COMICS
HAS GOTHAM GONE CRAZY-- INVADING METROPOLIS?
OUT OF THE WAY, HEROES! EVEN YOU CAN'T STOP EIGHT MILLION PEOPLE!
EXTRA BONUS:
GREEN ARROW AND HAWKMAN TOGETHER IN TITANIC TEAM-UP ACTION!

Carmine Infantino is drawing six new covers for Marvel UK; three, inked by Mike Esposito, are for SPIDER-MAN COMIC, and the others, inked by Dan Green, feature Godzilla for MARVEL COMIC.

The FRANTIC SUMMER SPECIAL, now out, should become a regular title if sales are encouraging--it features the best material from CRAZY, plus Howard the Duck and strips from NOT BRAND ECHH. Incidentally, Bem's semi-regular USA columnist, "Reg Uspatoff", is listed as "Legal Consultant"--d'you think Dez is indulging in a little in-joke?

Although Marvel USA cancelled FOOM, Dez is planning to produce FOOM #23 in Britain, concentrating on Marvel UK's recent achievements.

STARBURST #9 contains articles on "Thunderbirds" special effects and the "Lord of the Rings" animated movie.

STAR WARS WEEKLY will discontinue the Micronauts series shortly, as Baron Karza is too similar to Darth Vader to appear in the same comic; once a new backlog of USA material is built up the series should re-start in MARVEL COMIC. New back-ups for SWW are the Guardians of the Galaxy, and the return of Star Lord.

Byblos Publications are releasing a "Tarzan Summer Special".

British distribution: at present, the situation is as usual not exactly crystal-clear, but this is the latest schedule:

Monthlies	Bi-monthlies (Oct)
MARVEL TWO-IN-ONE	MACHINE MAN
SHOGUN WARRIORS	MARVEL PREMIERE
SPIDER-WOMAN	
CAPTAIN AMERICA	(Nov)
THOR	
AVENGERS	DAREDEVIL
X-MEN	MARVEL SPOTLIGHT
MARVEL TEAM-UP	
IRON MAN	
DEFENDERS	
MASTER OF KUNG FU	
TARZAN	
JOHN CARTER	

However, as TARZAN and JOHN CARTER end with the October issues, if 15 titles are to be imported in November, we need to find two more, out of MICRONAUTS, SPIDEY SUPER STORIES, MARVEL SUPER-HEROES, MAN-THING, SPIDER-MAN, BATTLESTAR GALACTICA, HULK, CONAN, MARVEL TALES, FANTASTIC FOUR, PETER PARKER, and STAR WARS. Your guess is as good as mine; maybe MARVEL SUPER-HEROES and MAN-THING?

There are now three versions of Marvel titles circulating in this country; the pence version (rising to 15p), with the month shown, is the most common, followed by the dealer copies which have a line through the product code box and the date and price box overprinted with a diamond shape only showing the 40 cents price, followed by the ordinary returnable American copies, which have the standard date and 40c price box and the product code box. Dealers now get the special non-returnable copies instead of the ordinary version, as copies sold to comics dealers are not sold on "Sale or return" terms, but some unscrupulous American dealers were returning unsold copies for credit.

Western Publishing, who publish Gold Key comics (Disney, Star Trek, Ripley's Believe it or Not, etc), is the subject of a take-over bid from Mattel Inc, the large toy manufacturer. This, if it goes through, would inject some much-needed cash into Western's operation, and help Mattel to diversify. More comics based on toys to come...? -ML

THE BEM INTERVIEW

BEM: Bill, I suppose the logical first question is to ask how you came to be involved in comics in the first place. Were you an active comics fan?

Bill: Well, I'm 27 now and I've been reading comics since I was 7 or 8. When I started, back in the 50s, comics were 10c. My weekly allowance was 25c -- this, of course, was before inflation and before they took the silver out of quarters--and with that I would hop on my bike and ride to the local candy store where I'd buy two comics and a pack of baseball cards (or monster, football, Davy Crockett cards, etc). Now you're lucky if you can get the cards for a quarter.

Anyway, the comics I bought then were the usual DC ones -- Superman, and their square-jawed Batman. I thought they were wonderful, and still do. Others were books like House of Mystery, Strange Adventures --I remember a lot of those short horror and sci-fi stories as being brilliantly told, simply told. Marvels, at that time still called Atlas, with their monster books somehow never caught my eye.

Then, in the early 60s, there was this sudden explosion. I'd walk into a candy store and, alongside Batman, there were titles like Flash, the Justice League, Green Lantern, and Showcase, introducing more heroes in a year than I'd seen in the previous decade. It was tremendously exciting, a whole new approach, and I followed the adventures of these DC heroes religiously, adding Metal Men, Sea Devils, Blackhawk, Hawkman, the Atom, etc, to my reading list--obviously my allowance had been raised. But even this DC explosion was as nothing the day I walked into that same candy store and there, on the stand where they usually stocked Batman, was a copy of Spider-Man #4. It looked...different. I skimmed through it, not quite knowing what to make of it, and put it back on the shelf. Then I took it down again, began to get caught up in this weird webbed character trying to hold onto this sandy villain who seemed to spill through his fingers and, well, I don't think I missed a single issue of Spider-Man from then onto the mid- or late-60s, when Ditko left.

I was in Junior High School then, a real rough school where you had to compensate for your inability to fight by possessing a talent. Mine was drawing. I spent so much time tracing Marvel comics that I began to develop a crude style. With friends -- including the bullies who went from wanting to kill me to begging to be put in the books as villains -- I began producing my own colored pencil and crayon comics called, I believe, Congo Comics. They featured such memorable characters as the Bulk and the Revengers. Real original. I should add a parenthetical comment that all this took place in JHS 192 in Queens, New York--a real dead-end as far as neighbourhoods and public education went. It could have all ended there, I mean like I could have gone on to Andrew Jackson High School a few blocks away and into wallpaper design, except that there was one art teacher who ignored her better judgement and insisted I take the test for NY's High School of Art & Design, in Manhattan.

I think I'd been to Manhattan twice in my life -- people in the boroughs of New York speak of Manhattan as "the City"--but I was determined not to go to Andrew Jackson, so I packed up my ludicrous portfolio of tracings and Congo Comics, got on the subway, and went to A & D. Miraculously, I passed the test, and spent the next four years ignoring my teachers, who declared that comics were crap, and continued drawing them. Yes, drawing. I wrote a lot of prose and such, and wrote the primitive comics I drew, but my primary interest was in becoming the next Gil Kane.

This continued until I entered the Cooper Union School of Art, a real prestigious art college in Manhattan. There I dropped comics like a stone, began painting and went on into photography. I spent the next four years taking pictures, and there I met another photographer, Karen Pocock, who was to become my wife. We both graduated, and immediately found photographers were a dime a dozen. I was unemployed, took some lousy civil service jobs, and then an old college friend, Annette Kawecki, called. Seems she had gotten a job as a letterer at Marvel Comics, and wondered whether I'd be interested in doing paste-ups and mechanicals for them.

I hadn't thought about Marvel Comics in years, literally, I had stopped buying them after I graduated high school, but a job was a job. I was interviewed by the late John Verpoorten, hired, and became his assistant, doing the most mindless production work there is.

But was I an active comic fan? Well, as I've said, I bought and read the mags all through high school, eventually dropping DC in the mid-60s, and then Marvel as I grew older and they, I felt, entered a rut in the late-60s, early-70s. I went to high school with Frank Brunner, and we'd go to a few comic conventions, but I don't think I ever belonged to any organised "fan" movement, and I never saw, let alone read, fanzines. But there was a group of artist-readers at Art & Design, and we all competed with each other to draw and, peripherally, write the stuff.

BEM: Of course, when you did start to do scripting, you weren't given a top Marvel series right away. What was your earliest work, and your earliest regular feature?

Bill: As I worked, I'd watch artists and writers wandering in, arguing, talking about their work. I'd given up all desire to draw comics, and I found most--not all, but most -- of the writing at this time (about 1972) to be really childish, especially the then black & white horror and kung fu books. I also noticed that most of the writers had incredible difficulty meeting their deadlines. I couldn't see why, the work didn't look that difficult -- especially given some of the stories they were producing.

So one day Tony Isabella, a Marvel writer and then-Editor of the black & white line, rushed into Verpoorten's office in a panic and cried that he needed someone to script a Sons of the Tiger story for Deadly Hands of Kung Fu overnight. He'd plotted the job, which was drawn by then-novice artist George Perez, but was caught in a deadline crunch and couldn't script it. John Verpoorten, who delighted in torturing poor little Tony, said he didn't have anyone who could turn in the job by the next day

without screwing up their own schedules. Tony, he said, would have to do it himself.

It was then that I heard myself say, almost involuntarily, "Tony, I'll do it."

Tony looked at me incredulously. I mean, I was a paste-up man who'd just recently begun colouring some Marvel books. But Tony had the decency not to laugh, and he gave me the job. I scripted it overnight, turned it in the next day and, with a very few editorial changes, it was accepted. The rest is history.

Since then, my speed and reliability got me the reputation as Marvel's "fill-in king". I would write any character quickly and, while my plotting was weak, everyone liked my dialogue. I seemed to have a flair for catching the Marvel hero's syntax. But, as editor after editor came and went (Roy Thomas to Len wein, Len to Marv Wolfman, Marv to Gerry Conway, Gerry to Archie Goodwin, Archie to Jim Shooter) I seemed to get passed over for a regular title. I'd done a run on MARVEL TEAM-UP, but that's one of those books that sells very well, but which writers hate. You can't really develop any of the characters because they all star elsewhere.

I was given other titles (FRANKENSTEIN, MORBIUS) but they were mags that were near

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cancellation anyway, and failed before I could even get started. Only my work on SONS OF THE TIGER had any sense of continuity, and there was an unfortunate and unfair tendency at Marvel to ignore the then-weak black & white department, and George Perez and I worked in virtual limbo, doing as we wished with our semi-kung fu characters, creating new heroes like the White Tiger.

Then someone noticed that George had gotten really good, and he was offered the FANTASTIC FOUR or the AVENGERS, I forget which. So George left, and we began to play musical artists on SONS OF THE TIGER. Keith Giffen, a favourite artist of mine, came in for an issue or two and we created JACK OF HEARTS (my idea, Keith's visualisation)--but the kung fu mag died shortly after, and I was put on IRON MAN and PETER PARKER, THE SPECTACULAR SPIDER-MAN. I also did fill-ins and mags like SKULL THE SLAYER, but it was on IRON MAN, my first regular feature with a character whose destiny I could control, that I really began to learn how to plot. PETER PARKER was plotted by Archie Goodwin for a time, so all I did was add the dialogue and captions, but IRON MAN was mine. I tried to take a sagging character out of Marvel limbo and build him back up to greatness. Again, I was hampered by lack of editorial interest and by George Tuska's extremely pedestrian art, but I think I began to achieve a measure of what I wanted -- to invest Iron Man/Tony Stark with some semblance of humanity -- before I was taken off the book. The reader reaction was incredibly, overwhelmingly positive, for both Shellhead and Jack of Hearts, who I brought into the mag, but Jim Shooter became Editor at about that time and, like anywhere else, an editor has his own ideas about how things should be. So Jim removed me from IRON MAN, but did so in the most professional manner I'd ever seen, at Marvel--instead of just taking away a mag and leaving his writers flat, he gave us the chance to create new titles, new characters, or to show what we could do on other Marvel series he thought we might be better suited to.

I had already proven that I could script Spider-Man, so now I was allowed to plot PETER PARKER as well. Then followed the MICRONAUTS; I was given TARZAN and, when Steve Gerber left Marvel, I was the first writer Jim asked to take over HOWARD THE DUCK! Jim, it seems, has this idea (based, I guess, on my offbeat work on SKULL, MAN FROM ATLANTIS, and THE HUMAN FLY) that I write best those characters outside the Marvel mainstream. I question that, but HOWARD certainly fits into Jim's theory.

BEM: It's often said that you've scripted more Marvel characters than anybody since Stan Lee, counting all the fill-in issues for various books you've done. Is it easy, to write a fill-in issue for a long-running title? Is it a fair way of judging how good a new writer is?

Bill: Fill-ins are a terrible way to judge a newcomer's work. At the time I started, writing fill-ins meant producing a mag overnight, or on your lunch hour (remember, I was still working as a production assistant at the Marvel bullpen; unlike now where, as a freelancer, I work out of my home) and quality was secondary to speed. The writer was put in a lousy position--on the one hand you had the artist screaming that he needed work immediately (and if it was Sal or John Buscema you didn't dare not send him something) and, on the other hand, you had an editor who either didn't have the time to oversee your work, or the inclination. This did vary, of course, from editor to editor--some not having the time, others not caring. So you'd quickly draw on your remembrance of a character you'd never written before (I was lucky, I guess, in having a very vivid memory of everything Stan Lee ever wrote, having read Marvel when Stan wrote just about everything), and bang out a plot, or phone it to the artist. Then, when it came back, and the same editor who hadn't bothered to read over your plot before saw the script, they'd blow their corks and scream, "This isn't what we wanted!" forgetting that they'd never given any indication of what it was they did want. My saving grace again was syntax--I could make Thor sound like Thor, Spider-Man sound like Spider-Man, and had all the sub-characters reasonably straight.

Another factor was that Marvel always missed deadlines at the engraver or the printer, and many books were passed through editorial as if along an assembly line, hence all those typos, uncorrected colouring, and plot faux pas.

BEM: What characters did you find easiest to write fill-ins for, and which were the most difficult?

Bill: I've always found Spider-Man the easiest Marvel character to script. Plotting is different because, never having written the main Spider-Man book--AMAZING SPIDER-MAN -- I was never able to control or direct the fate of the character totally. The FANTASTIC FOUR and THOR I find extremely easy and enjoyable. DAREDEVIL writes easily, but I've never had to deal with any of his sub-plots. IRON MAN is tricky, but enjoyable. KILLRAVEN and the DEFENDERS were dreadful, either because the writers at the time I did my fill-ins were in the middle of incredibly convoluted storylines or because they themselves seemed unable to focus on their characters. With those two I was also in the unenviable position of scripting "cult comics" --mags that had picked up a rabid following and for whom it was sacrilege to have an issue written by someone else. The X-MEN was another such title but, at the time my fill-in was scripted, only the very first appearance of the new X-Men had premiered, and none of Chris Claremont's subsequent character development had been initiated. When mine did run, readers asked where all that characterization went. Had I been able to respond at the time, I would have said, "Hey! There weren't none when I wrote my issue!"

BEM: In an interview in THE HEROINES SHOWCASE #16, Chris Claremont mentioned that both you and he were "pulling off the same stuff", the Len Wein giant issue, when he wrote X-MEN #94 and you wrote the fill-in, and that your issue could have gone in and worked then, but in the intervening two years the characters had developed totally different voices, so he re-wrote it, so that in the end there was hardly a line in there that was in your original script. So you shouldn't get the blame if the characterisation was below par!

Bill: Chris is absolutely correct. I agree with him. My fill-in issue of the X-MEN was plotted for a specific time -- within a few months of the day it was plotted--and by the time it finally ran, the characters had changed and developed beyond it. I had no objection to Chris's rewrite (since I was paid for my original script anyway), and would have aided in the rewriting had it been necessary or had he asked me to. I think Chris's X-MEN is one of the finest comics produced by Marvel. For awhile it seemed to be the only title truly deserving the name "original". I think times have changed since then, though. While the X-MEN is still original and enormously popular, I think my MICRONAUTS is catching up, and that some of the fine work being produced by Dave Michelinie on the AVENGERS and by Roger McKenzie on DAREDEVIL is beginning to truly create a new "Marvel Renaissance". Sure, you've heard about Marvel moving again before, but this time, under Jim Shooter's editorial control, it really seems to be happening. And wait until you see our newest character: ROM!

BEM: How did the book's regular writer feel about someone else coming in to do a fill-in writing "his" character?

Bill: The regular writers, if they were professionals, never objected to fill-ins, realizing that they were late and that the book had to come out. The prima donnas always objected. I think it's safe to say that most of those prima donnas no longer work at Marvel, and that is partially attributable to Jim Shooter.

BEM: Marvel's changed since you began to write fill-ins, I imagine.

Bill: Marv Wolfman was the first editor who gave me a chance at a colour mag, and it was Marv who seemed to have the most respect for my work, and the most compassion for what it was like to be a "fill-in king". But Marv, like Len and Archie and Roy, got swamped by idiotic business concerns with Cadence and, after a time, couldn't oversee the books. Marv's a writer, not a businessman. He couldn't do both and still get quality from his writers. So he quit. Gerry Conway was hired, and he quit. Archie Goodwin was hired, and he quit. Jim Shooter was hired...

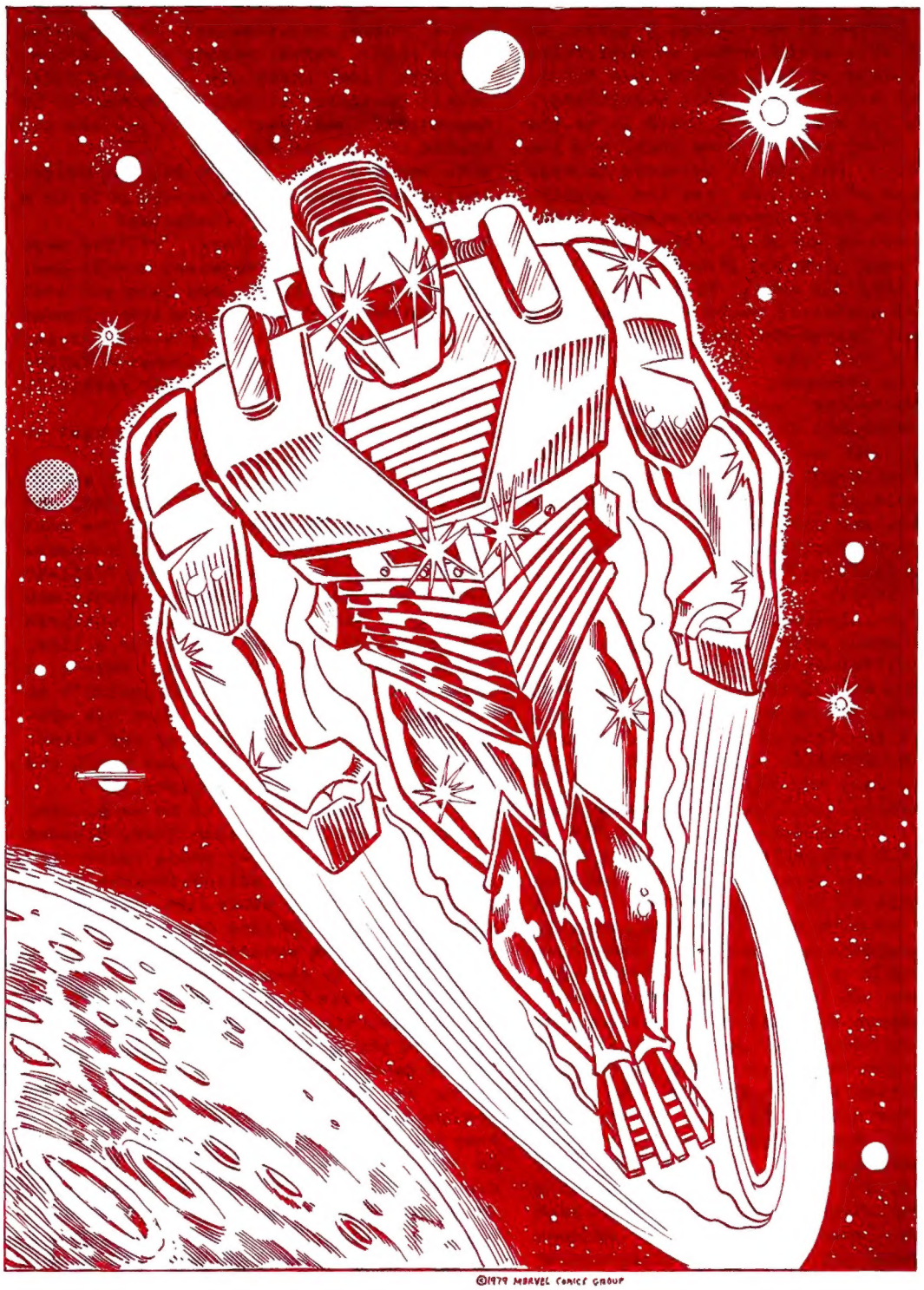
...And changes began to be made. Jim, in close consultation with Stan, divided up the editorial load among associate editors while he, as editor-in-chief, was responsible for the whole line. This meant he could devote his time and considerable energies to the business and conceptual end, while his associates (Roger Stern, Al Milgrom, Mark Gruenwald, Ralph Macchio, Jo Duffy and Rick Marschall) devoted themselves to the direction of specific books and to general proofreading.

Jim is also totally professional. He assigns writers to books because he feels they belong there, not out of favouritism or nepotism or fannishness. A writer always knows exactly where he stands under Jim (literally under, Jim being well over six feet tall), which is a refreshing change from the constant uncertainty and insecurity which plagued Marvel for years.

Jim is also the finest plotter (Marv Wolfman's a close second) I've ever met. He knows what you're doing with your characters, and can quickly pinpoint what you should be doing with them. He'll override your directions, but he'll tell you why he's doing it, and his reasoning is never capricious. I've gained tremendous respect for Jim over the past year and a half. He's made writing for Marvel fun again.

BEM: I tend to think of your writing on MARVEL TEAM-UP as your "big break", Bill. Was it an assignment you wanted? Did you enjoy it? And how sad were you to leave?

Bill: MARVEL TEAM-UP, as I said, was enjoyable but limited. You couldn't develop the character of either Spidey or his guest star, so you tended to do hero meets hero/they fight/reconcile/and go after villain together stories. Real primal stuff. I tried to change that by (a) getting Spidey's alter-ego, Peter Parker, in more often; (b) extending guest stars for more than one issue--I was the first to do this with MTU; (c) introduce my own supporting cast -- i.e., lady detective Jean DeWolff; and (d) have Spidey time- and space-hopping just to get him out of New York, where he would've collided with himself due to his appearances in PETER PARKER and AMAZING. But, needless to say, while the readers liked these excursions, extended appearances, etc, some editors didn't, wanting to return MTU to its



second-class status. I think I had run my course on MTU, and didn't mind giving it up. But I think I changed everyone's conception of MTU, and I think that Chris Claremont has continued my directions, adding a few embellishments of his own. Like crashing jet-liners every other month...

BEM: Before we go on to the Micronauts, we ought to talk a little more about your work on 'Sons of the Tiger' and 'White Tiger'. Did you find more freedom in the black & white books, both for you and the artist? And how did you come to create the first Puerto Rican superhero?

Bill: There was more freedom in the black & white books at the time I did SONS OF THE TIGER primarily because no-one cared. George Perez and I pretty much did as we pleased, and George began perfecting some of that wonderful multi-panel experimental storytelling of his free from editorial oversight, or concern. George, of course, is Hispanic, Puerto Rican to be exact, and had an intimate knowledge of the gritty City/slum that is the South Bronx. So I said, "Hey George -- let's do a character that reflects that grim reality!" I described the costume as Spidey's without any details (remember, in black & white magazines colour is nonexistent), and George went home and designed it. The conception was mine, but nobody brings a character to life like George Perez, so we share the credit of having created Hector Ayala/the White Tiger. But again, though reader-interest was massive, no one in editorial at the time cared to see Hector in his own mag. Why? Perhaps they feel the sales potential of the character is poor, perhaps they're afraid of Marvel's predominantly white middle-class audience ignoring an Hispanic super-hero. Luke Cage doesn't sell all that well but, as I've pointed out, the White Tiger isn't Luke Cage. WT. is popular as a co-star in PETER PARKER, but I'll be phasing him out of there to concentrate more on Spidey. So he will vanish, maybe forever, into Marvel limbo. I'd like to showcase him somewhere, as I did Jack of Hearts (another character no-one at the bullpen cared for, though the fans loved him), but it doesn't seem likely. Another problem is that fans, while vocal, make up a minority of Marvel's buying audience. It's the kids who pick up a mag at the newsstand month after month because something about the mag catches their eye who keep Marvel's main titles alive. I don't know if Jack of Hearts or the White Tiger have that potential. I don't plan on doing anything with Jack in the near future, and I don't know if anyone else does, either. I'd like to start a new super-group with him in it, but I don't know how likely that is. As I see it, it would feature JACK, the WHITE TIGER, HAWKEYE, the BLACK WIDOW, and another female, perhaps a new character.

BEM: I find Jack a most exhilarating, intriguing hero. If he is given his own book, would you automatically be the writer? How would you feel if somebody else was given the scripting assignment?

Bill: If Jack was given his own book, based on sales from his appearance in MARVEL PREMIERE, I would say that, knowing Jim Shooter, I would be given the mag to write. Whether I stayed on it would depend on the quality I bring to it and, to some extent, the sales figures. But I'm realistic and professional enough to realize that, under present circumstances in the industry, I don't own any character or concept I create for a Marvel mag--Marvel owns it. So if Marvel chose to replace me on my own character, which I don't think Stan or Jim would do without overwhelming reasons, I would have little to complain about, having entered into the arrangement with my eyes open. I'd like to see this system change. I'd like to see writers and artists given a percentage of their characters, of any merchandising rights sold, of reprint residuals for foreign publication (we only get domestic reprint residuals now)--but all that's what I'd like to see, not what is. But I assume your question is a veiled reference to my taking over HOWARD THE DUCK after Steve Gerber left. Everyone assumes, partially because of Steve's own statements, that HOWARD was Steve's duck. Steve created Howard (with Val Mayerik and Frank Brunner--and a roomfull of people one night at a party, as I hear it) but he also signed the Marvel cheques, which clearly state that any rights to any characters or concepts belong to Marvel. It's one thing to challenge that statement before you sign, but quite another to challenge it retroactively, a few years after Marvel's taken the risk of publishing 31 issues of the duck. I agree with Steve's position re writer's ownership, but that's simply not reality at the present moment. So, if Marvel did take Jack or Micronauts away from me, I'd have to choose between quitting or accepting it.

BEM: Right, let's move on to the Micronauts. How did Marvel come to be doing this series?

Bill: My son got a few of the Mego Micronaut toys for Christmas in 1977. I thought they had great potential and wrote a proposal, detailing the direction I foresaw for a book about these tiny aliens from a subatomic Microverse, and handed it to Jim Shooter. Jim apparently liked the idea, because he got in touch with Stan and they got in touch with Mego. The idea went through, and Jim gave me the go-ahead to develop the characters, to write a treatment. I did, and then we searched for an artist. Jack Kirby was mentioned, but he was ending out his contract with Marvel and no-one knew whether he'd renew it--subsequently, he didn't. Then George Perez was contacted. George accepted, but it quickly became obvious that he couldn't handle the workload.

Jim called me up--I was getting desperate to begin -- and asked me if I'd seen the work of Michael Golden over at National. I said no, I never read DC comics, but Jim suggested I pick up MISTER MIRACLE! I did, and fell in love with Michael's artwork immediately. Jim got in touch with Michael, who asked, "What? A comic book about little toys??" but who agreed to get together with us to discuss it. Mike evidently liked the direction I laid out, because he accepted, and he, I, and editor Bob Hall began plotting the first twelve issues (yes, we plotted the entire epic, from Karza's triumph to his downfall) at the start, so the Karza Epic would be finite. We weren't sure, because of contractual arrangements with Mego, whether we could feature Marvel characters in the

mag, so we avoided it--later it turned out that we could feature Marvel characters in the MICRONAUTS, but that we couldn't feature the Micronauts in any other Marvel mag. I added Marionette and Bug to Mego's lineup, made Acroyear a good guy--in opposition to Acroyear II, his brother Prince Shaitan--and Michael designed the Endeavor. We got to work, and produced the most convoluted first issue in the history of comics. Jim and Stan were appalled. "What did you do? We can't understand this?!" they yelled. "And if we can't understand it, how do you expect the kids to understand it?!" they continued.

Michael and I got extremely depressed, and began to try and simplify the storyline without sacrificing any of the sci-fi elements inherent in the book; no easy task when you're dealing with immortality, body banks, sub-molecular solar systems, warp drives and the like. But we persevered, and the result is a mag that seems to be incredibly popular, on a par with the X-MEN fanwise, although we still haven't received any sales figures on #1 (it takes about 12 weeks). So, at the time of this interview, we don't know if we have a hit or a flop on our hands, or what. I hope it's a hit, and I understand MICRONAUTS has begun to appear in STAR WARS WEEKLY with #50 over your way. I just wish Michael and I got residuals out of that.

BEM: How much say do you have regarding the artists for a feature you script, like MICRONAUTS?

Bill: As far as artists, Jim and Al Milgrom are very attentive to my pleas. They listen to my requests, then tell me it can't be done, and tell me who is available. But on MICRONAUTS I've been very fortunate in working with Michael--a great artist, and fantastic storyteller. However, Michael's taking a 5-issue leave of absence after MICRONAUTS #12, and Howard Chaykin -- another favourite of mine for years--will do those five issues, with Al Milgrom himself tentatively scheduled to ink them. MICRONAUTS #s 13 & 14 have been turned in by Howie already, and they're great, dealing with Bug on his homeworld of Kaliklak. Very Gil Kaneish, very science-fictiony.

BEM: How do you see the personalities of the main characters in MICRONAUTS?

Bill: The personalities of the characters partially arose from their visual appearance as toys. Not knowing Mego's conception of their own toys at the time, I decided that their Space Glider looked like a commander of a starship, that Biotron looked like an obsolete, semi-human robot, that Microtron looked like he was a funny little guy, that Acroyear looked tough, and Acroyear II and Baron Karza evil. Time Traveller looked ethereal. Force Commander suggested not so much the ultimate force for good, but an emissary for good. There were no female toys--I'm told the Japanese female toy characters are considered sexually gross to American toy-buyers, firing projectiles from their breasts and pubic areas, etc--so I created Marionette, the Princess Mari. Mego's Galactic Warrior I made insect-like, and gave the name Bug, but Mego's disowned Bug and now he's a Marvel-owned character. Slug, Captain Universe, Jasmine, Cilicia and other characters who will be making appearances sooner or later are all my, or my and Michael's, creations.

BEM: Does the name "Arcturus Rann" have any connection with that classic sf series of the sixties, in which Adam Strange adventured on a planet called Rann?

Bill: I made Commander Rann/Space Glider commander of the Endeavor, borrowing his last name from the planet that Adam Strange found himself zeta-beamed to years ago, as homage to the artists and writers of that classic strip. I'm big into paying my respects to creators of the classic comic book heroes I grew up with.

BEM: The whole series seems an intriguing mixture of a number of plots and concepts that have never been done full justice in comics before--Kirby's 'Fourth World' for instance. I was going to mention 'Star Wars', but that itself is more of a skilful mixture of concepts than a wholely original brew...

Bill: Kirby's 'Fourth World' was incredibly inspirational, though, I always felt, erratic and confusing, spread over five or more books. I try to accomplish what Jack attempted in one book. It ain't easy. 'Star Wars', too, had some effect, but not much. I saw the movie well after I'd conceived the MICRONAUTS, and was surprised at how closely the two meshed. But, as you say, 'Star Wars' itself was a derivative of both standard sci-fi stories and much of Stan Lee's work, which I consider a direct precursor of my own writing. So MICRONAUTS is a mixture of the new and the old, of comics with sci-fi, of comics with history (you'll see a lot of sidewise references to Herodotus in the mag) and of comics with religion. I guess its closest parallels are, again, Kirby's 'Fourth World' and the THOR cosmic stuff he and Stan did back in the mid-sixties. Yeah, a lot of THOR.

BEM: How long do you see yourself writing MICRONAUTS? If you had to relinquish one of your assignments, would it be this one, HOWARD, or what?

Bill: I'd like to write MICRONAUTS until it becomes boring. I'm a great believer in writing 100 issues of a mag. I've never done it, but I think it's incredible, for instance, that Stan did in the FANTASTIC FOUR, THOR, and SPIDER-MAN, and I'd like to try it. I like the idea of crafting an epic. I don't know if all the characters will remain constant -- after all, by MICRONAUTS #14 I've got two more members, both female, added to the team, and it's beginning to get unwieldy -- but change, too, is part of the epic structure.

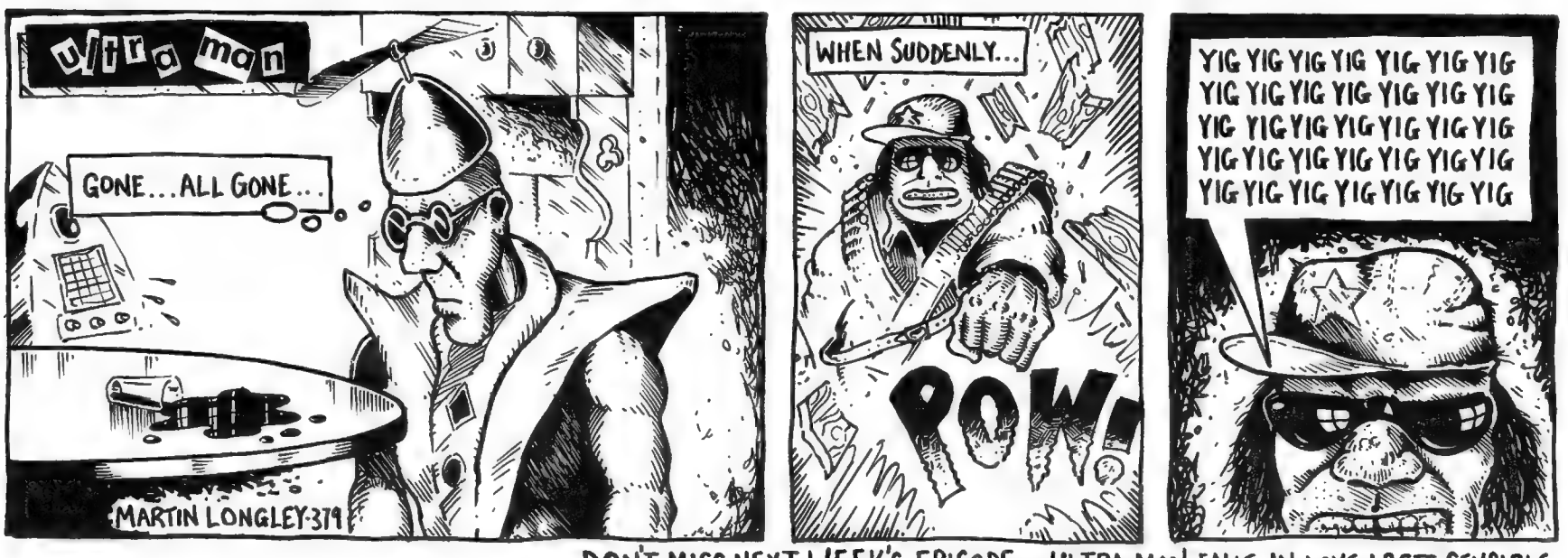
As far as relinquishing assignments, I rarely have to give up anything because I'm so fast. Usually I'm deprived of a mag through cancellation or trade-off. I guess I'd let TARZAN go first, although I find it supremely easy to write, because I don't really think you can top Burroughs, or that you can continue adapting him, or that you can write a character who's been around 60 or 70 years without repeating what's already been done. Also, although I love Sal Buscema's layouts on the book, I've hated practically every inker. I don't think the book looks very good, and I'm very concerned with the ultimate quality of the books I write.

HOWARD I wouldn't give up for the world.

BEM: Talking of HOWARD THE DUCK, are you finding it hard or easy to step in in the wake of Steve Gerber?

Bill: I find HOWARD easy to write, but most of all I find it fun to write. The duck and I share similar egocentricities (don't ask me what they are) and I find that my sense of the absurd isn't very different--though more linear--than Steve Gerber's. At first I worried about following Steve, stepping into his shoes, etc, and hate-mail from fans who hadn't even read my first issue (#30) didn't help. Nor did the preceding two fill-in issues. But after HOWARD #30 hit the stands and the mail started pouring in, I know my fears were groundless. The praise was overwhelming. The criticisms were right-on. Only a few nut letters like "I'm not ever going to read Howard again because Marvel screwed Steve Gerber...!" Hey! I didn't screw Steve Gerber (I don't swing that way!), I just wrote what I was told to write, and let Marvel and Steve have it out by themselves. I do resent people refusing to even look at my work on HOWARD or judging me by some incomplete or faulty understanding they've developed about what it means to be a professional comic book writer. But then I cooled out and decided it was their loss. Hell, I know I'm doing a good job on the duck, both on the colour comic and the new black & white magazine, so why should I worry about some nutso fan who's gonna denounce my work without even reading it? If they don't like it after reading it, that's another story, and I'm willing to chance their disapproval.

BEM: Thank you for your time and trouble, Bill, I've found what you've told us very interesting. There's a lot more we could cover -- but let's leave things here for the time being. -ML


ultra man
GONE...ALL GONE...
MARTIN LONGLEY-379
WHEN SUDDENLY...
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DON'T MISS NEXT WEEK'S EPISODE— ULTRA MAN FALLS IN LOVE +GETS SENSIBLE.

UNAMERICAN ACTIVITIES

Night-time in the city. There comes a time when one has to move on -- and after over two years, I feel that to go on with "Unamerican Activities", or as it used to be called "Made In Britain", would be to start going over old ground. I've had my say, and I've achieved my ambition to be the writer of a regular fanzine column--if I haven't tempted you to try the many delights outside the "Marvel All-Colour Comics" range after an even dozen instalments, it's time I found a more rewarding occupation, anyway! If I can have any say in the matter, I bequeath this column's space to the Review Section, which seems to have fallen upon hard times lately--I certainly intend to remain active there, though not necessarily reviewing British comics. Type-casting can be a terrible thing for a fan, y'know, and I do read a good many DC and Marvel comics too!

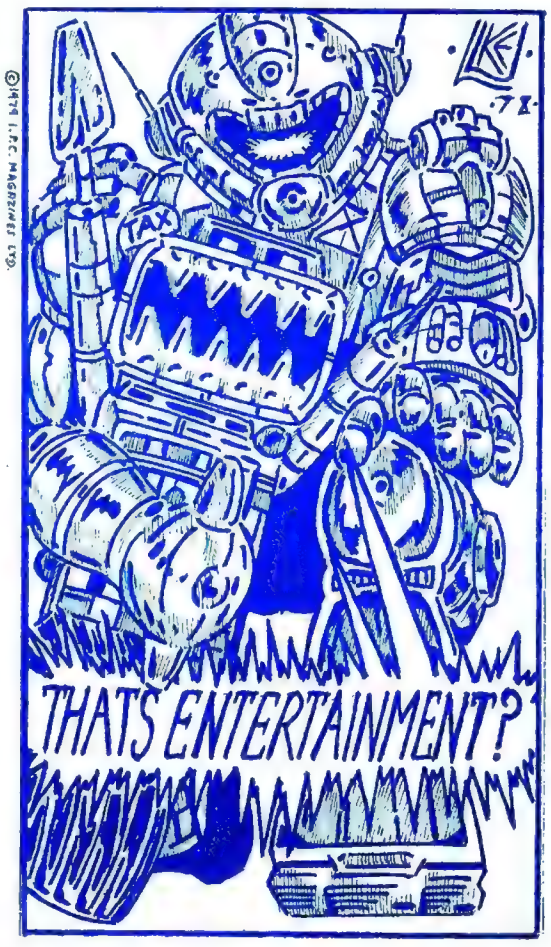
Things have changed since this column began in Bem-12, an issue also notable for an interview with Howard the Duck by The Legendary Nige Edwards, and the start of Kathleen Glancy's column. CAPTAIN BRITAIN, HOUSE OF HAMMER, BRAINSTORM, and ALLY SLOPER led the scene then -- which shows that two years is a long time in comics. Why, 2000 A.D. hadn't even started then!

However, let's look to the present--and the future. STARBLAZER is a new sf title from D.C. Thomson in the "picture library" format, with 68 7" by 5½" pages for 12p; it's about time sf made a come-back in this format, too long reserved solely for war and love stories, and I hope IPC, who are experimenting with three-in-one SPACE PICTURE LIBRARY holiday specials reprinting "Jet-Ace Logan" stories, start up a new, regular series too.

STARBLAZER ≠1 concerns the adventures of space test pilot Lute Fireball, who travels through an artificially produced black hole to a far-off part of the galaxy. With a name like that, he couldn't really be a chartered accountant, could he! On this far-off world, nasty robots rule--until about page 63, that is. Both art and story are above average for this sort of production, actually; since they can remain on sale indefinitely, you may still be able to find "The Omega Experiment", as this first issue calls itself. And "The Domes of Death", issue two, is out now too, starring "Shrapnel Stevens".

One magazine I haven't mentioned enough of late is NEAR MYTHS--but if you've seen the cover of ≠3, with Luthor Arkwright by Bryan Talbot in full glorious colour, you will have bought a minimum of one copy already! I wish I had ≠4 in time to give it a review, but I gather it's even better than ≠3, with of course chapter four of "The Adventures of Luthor Arkwright" and other goodies. I certainly hope that this comic, now the only regular, distributed British alternative comic, continues, and that its recent drop in frequency is only a temporary measure; with the Birmingham Arts Lab Press out of action (at least as far as publishing alternative comix goes) there's hardly anywhere else this side of I.P.C. for talented artists like Bryan Talbot, Graham Manley, and the rest to show us what they can do. NM costs 55p by post from GMD, 40, West Crosscauseway, Edinburgh, Scotland--6 issues for £3.30.

British Marvel has come a long way since the days of Captain Britain, The Complete Fantastic Four, and all those other comics that came and went with fair regularity. Dez Skinn, assisted by Alan "I have never been a 'well-known British fan'" McKenzie and, in the early days of his tenure, Richard Burton, certainly has sprung on us a "Marvel Revolution". Now, quite a few fans don't seem too happy with what Dez hath wrought (and try saying that fast with a mouth full of bubble-gum), but it isn't the fans Dez is out to please with his 10p weeklies -- it's the young comics buyers who make up 99% or so of a weekly comic's potential audience. Making the Marvel product more similar to the more successful I.P.C. and D.C. Thomson comics is a sound move, with more features per title and the traditional pulpy paper; if it exposes more people to that elusive Mighty Marvel Magick, in the long term "fandom" can only benefit. And monthly magazines like Rampage, Savage Sword of Conan, and Starburst cater to the older



readers, providing a more "respectable" format for comics art. The weekly format is too constricting, the deadlines too frequent -- I see the monthly magazine as taking over in the long run, although it is unlikely that Dandy and Beano will ever stop appearing. That's probably why I like the "Holiday Specials" that appear every few months, despite the number of corny old reprints and the poor value per page compared with the weeklies. It's nice that at last Marvel UK are trying some -- it will be even nicer if they become regular monthly magazines, which I gather will happen if sales warrant it, especially on Frantic, which can in no way be described as a British edition of Crazy, and should feature some original British material.

NEW COMICS LIST
OUT SOON ::::::: SEND AN SAE
To/
BILLY MULRANEY

Since this is my last column, I'll now indulge myself by listing my "top twenty" British-produced weekly strips; personal favourites, that is:

1. Judge Dredd (2000 A.D.)
2. Ro-Busters (2000 A.D.)
3. Captain Klep (Tornado)
4. Black Hawk (Tornado)
5. Dan Dare (2000 A.D.)
6. Charley's War (Battle-Action)
7. The Mysterious Night-Raven (Hulk)
8. Johnny Red (Battle-Action)
9. Strontium Dog (2000 A.D.)
10. Crazy Keller (Battle-Action)
11. The Black Knight (Hulk Comic)
12. The Angry Planet (Tornado)
13. H.M.S. Nightshade (Battle-Action)
14. Bionic Action (Look-In)
15. Elephant On The Run (Cheeky)
16. The Spinball Wars (Battle-Action)
17. Dick Turpin (Look-In)
18. Nick Fury (Hulk Comic)
19. Wagner's Walk (Tornado)
20. The Incredible Hulk (Hulk Comic)

Now, if that doesn't cause some controversy for Reaction I'll be very surprised! It's a pity the colour Bionic Woman strip drawn by John Bolton in Look-In has just ended, replaced (in 1979 ≠22) by the black & white strip I've placed 14th, drawn by Ian Gibson--that gorgeous full-colour art would have put it well up the list. And 2000 A.D.'s Robo-Hunter would have made sixth place, I reckon--but what's passed is the past, so they say, and we must move on to fresh glories. Ian Gibson moves from 2000 A.D. to Look-In, and John Bolton in turn moves from Look-In on to take over Night-Raven in Hulk Comic, as well as I'm sure sundry other projects. I'd better move on to some other subject too, before I start having second thoughts about the order, and the exclusions!

And the next paragraph is just to make sure you haven't missed the article by John Dakin on The Sun's "Axa" strip (by Enrique Badia Romero, with dialogue & co-plotting by Donne Avenell) in The Comics Journal ≠46, a special Spirit issue you can find in most good specialist fantasy & comic shops. Since I don't collect any newspaper strips, this column has always under-emphasised them--but John makes up for this, with some interesting insights on the other strips Romero has worked on as well. And I gather John is publishing a reprint of a Garth adventure, too; but I'm sure "Fan-Things" will mention that.

So, keep watching the stands, for the weeklies, the digest-sizers like Donald Duck Fun Library (at 50p surely the most expensive regular UK published comic) and the Picture Library editions, the glossy-covered monthlies, the holiday specials, paperback strip reprints, and the soft and hard-cover albums of Asterix, Ompa-Pa, Lieutenant Blueberry, Iznogoud, Tintin, Lucky Luke, Donald Duck, the Smurfs...

See you there! -RUAN LANIHORNE

KATHOLICITY

What if What If was cancelled, and replaced by a different comic -- and the sooner the better? Ah yes indeed, you are quite right, Nigel. (Hey, welcome back. Where've you been? When can we expect the next issue of, what was its name again, that we all subscribed to all those years ago?) The trouble is, it was a good idea gone to waste. Let's face it, they are never going to show us what happens if Conan defeats Red Sonja in combat, not that we can't all take a good guess. And the current what If Spider-Man was Daredevil while Captain America walked in the Hyborian Age and Nick Fury never got an eyepatch because he was 4 different people plots do tend to provoke the reaction, "Who Cares?" I think Marvel should give up the idea entirely and let the originators of the Imaginary Story have a go at the format. So here are some of my ideas for DC's 'Just Imagine' (Thank you, Howard. Welcome back to you, too.)

Superman once visited an alternate world where he was a crook. Flash visited possibly the same world, where he too was a crook--and the Mirror Master was a hero. A closer look at that world might be interesting, especially if it explained how the heroes and villains got their motives reversed. Superman could have fallen into other hands than the Kents', and been reared dishonest. Fortunately, the noble and brilliant scientist, Lex Luthor, who never lost his hair or his moral standards on this world, is there to hold him in check. Bruce Wayne's parents walked into a shoot-out between the police and criminals, and were cut down by police bullets, giving him a pathological hatred of law and order. Green Arrow was so embittered by the loss of his fortune he decided to emulate Robin Hood in deadly earnest, robbing the rich and giving to the poor. To poor Oliver Queen to be exact. Whereas Green Lantern is an agent of a group of blue fanatics determined to rule the Universe--only the heroic deserter from their ranks, Sinestro, dares oppose him. Etc, etc.

Or suppose Earth-1's Superman was to turn totally, irrevocably bad. It should not be beyond Lex Luthor to invent an irreversible mind-warping ray, and rather than fight Superman himself he could sit back and watch the Justice League do it for him. And if Superman used his powers ruthlessly and had no compunction about killing, he would be a match for the whole of the rest of the League, who would probably end up having to kill him to stop him -- if they could. They would almost certainly suffer some fatalities themselves in the process.

Then there was Abin Sur, crash-landed on Earth, dying, and needing to select a replacement Green Lantern in some haste. Presumably his ring-probe worked under some constraints in doing that. We know that the person chosen had to be exceptionally courageous, of high moral integrity, and having a strong will. We may assume also that he or she must be in perfect health and physically strong, but should be a typical specimen of the dominant race of the planet on which they would be based, thus ruling out immigrants from other planets or natives whose abilities, through mutation or external influence, differed greatly from the norm. Now, suppose Hal Jordan, Guy Gardner, and John Stewart all happened to be out of the ring's range (they had all won free holidays in Europe in a competition) and the lot fell instead on Bruce Wayne. Or Oliver Queen. Or Ray Palmer, not yet the Atom. Or (don't laugh, she meets all the conditions) Lois Lane.

Anyone remember the girl called Misty, she who was used and I do mean used by the robot Teacher to test Superboy's ethics? ((See DC SUPERSTARS #12 -ML)) Now Misty, or whatever her name really was, and Superboy, it is very clearly implied, actually did have an affair. They are seen embracing in a house which, we have been told previously, has nobody else in it. Cut to Ma Kent, complaining about Superboy's all-night patrols. As it was probably a first experience for both of them -- it certainly was for one of them -- it is questionable whether they took any precautions. So it is quite possible that she could have become pregnant. My, but the poor girl would have been in an unfortunate position. She had, after all, forgotten that she ever knew Superboy. She wouldn't be able to remember who her child's father was -- though she could take a good guess if it grew up super-powered. Suppose then

that she somehow managed to keep it a secret, until in the present Superman suddenly discovered he had to cope with a thirteen-year-old, illegitimate, probably more than somewhat resentful son, or daughter, or twins. And what would Lois say? No, I don't suppose the Code would stand for that one.

But what I'd really like to see is a story on what would have happened had the Kryptonian scientist who managed to save his baby son been an inhabitant of Vathlo Island. The home, in case anyone doesn't know, of a highly developed black race, who despite being a numerical minority were never colonized or enslaved by the white race. (Presumably the fact that the white race had been enslaved by aliens once or twice had given them an abhorence of the practise.) Assuming the child had landed in the same place as Kal-El did--would the Kents, in the social climate of the 50s, have had the courage, or the inclination, to adopt a black baby? If they did, how would Smallville society (have you noticed Smallville doesn't seem to have any black population?) treat him and them? If not, what chance would he have of being adopted, in a time when nearly all illegitimate children went for adoption, and the adopters were mostly white? He could have spent all his formative years in an institution, and very probably one in a ghetto at that. And when he went public--how would the world react to a black Superman? He would grow to manhood during the great civil rights campaigns of the 60s -- just imagine the effect both on him and by him. Especially if Lois Lane still fell in love with him.

And now for something completely different. One day Bruce Banner was walking down the road when a Charles Atlas graduate jostled him into the gutter. Getting mad, he changed into the Hulk and, as usual, his shirt ripped off. But this time his purple pants at last gave up under the strain, and ripped off too. On the opposite side of the street, it so happened, Linda Lovelace was walking, and when she saw the Hulk letting it all hang out she made a beeline across the road to get at him. Unfortunately a huge lorry sped by, and splat went Linda Lovelace. The moral of this little story is that you should never start to cross the road if the green man is flashing.

-KATHLEEN GLANCY

It's intelligent, amusing, controversial, and sometimes outrageous. Fan's and features include: Heavy Metal, S.F. by Mike Dickinson, Kirby's Fourth World, Dick Domar, Art and article by Phil Elliott, art by Wieczorek & Stainton, three strips, etc. and thats only the first issue. Issue two out very soon, includes such diverse material as Near Myths, a short prose piece, Guff Strut and a lot more, but we are not going to say what, why should we, buy it and find out, simply lighten your wallets a little.(or steal a copy if you want a cheap thrill/a belt in the mouth)...

One issue; UK & Europe 28p, USA 65c. Four issues(one year); UK & Europe £1.10p, USA $2.50. All prices inc. p&p. Make cheques, etc payable to J. Foster.

FROM:
JOHN FOSTER.

-ADVERTISEMENT-

Reaction

Kenny Penman

Whilst browsing thru Edinburgh's Sci Fi Bookshop I happened upon Bem 23, and decided to give it a read. Frankly I was amazed by the high quality of the fanzine, both in terms of overall finish and the intelligence of the contributors. It certainly represents better value for money at 30p than do many of the recent Marvel imports -- although without them it would have little reason to exist. /(I have allowed that para to remain as a special treat for Locky, who's been moaning that I've been sadistically deleting all the glowing compliments. Wipe away the tears, Marty; I'd do the same for any Wizard.)/

I was pleased with the fairly high standard of art thruout the zine, especially the strong cover by Brian Bolland; I didn't realise there was so much talent amongst fandom at large. The articles were also of interest, especially the Made In America article, and of course Comic News. Kathleen Glancy's article on Quicksilver I found to be very perceptive, but a little too emotionally idealistic in her defence of the character. As I see it, Kath's main gripe against Moondragon's actions towards Quicksilver were that one person should not have the right to tamper with another's mind, just because that person believes he/she knows best. That this action is carried out by Moondragon should not be held wholly against her, although I agree with Kath that she is a bigoted and often obnoxious character herself--it just happens that, because of her powers, this action fell into her lap. The fact that she has acted upon Quicksilver's personality is only startling in that it has taken so long for someone to take this action. To my mind, the idea behind this action is that society needs stability, whether it be human or superhero based, if it is to maintain any personality of its own. To this end those who fall outside what is considered normal are chastised or treated, not necessarily for their own good but so as they will be less of a nuisance to the group that they belong to, eg Mankind, The Avengers, etc. That this may or may not be wrong is hardly the question--Moondragon is no more guilty of obscene interferance with someone's personality than is any national government, or even Kath or I, who are trying to influence people's thoughts on Quicksilver--are we not? So, as far as I can see the action was more usual than unusual, more moral than immoral (by our present codes); and there I rest my case. /(Oooo, but Kathy will be having something to say to you, I bet...)/

Regarding the comments on sexploitation arising from Ivo Steyn's letter, I would query the fact that just because to make it as a woman in comics you have to have "huge knockers" means that females are being exploited. I would suggest that in direct contrast to the position in comics, the women today who are exploited are not those with "huge knockers", but those who are slim, flat-chested (to a great extent) and exude an almost corrupt child type of sexuality. It seems to me that women in comics will always have "huge knockers" because on the whole they simply look better on the illustrated page -- and in case you're worried, "huge knockers" are not my personal preference.

I would like to finish by expressing my disgust at the discontinuation of the excellent TOMB OF DRACULA, my joy at the discontinuation of MS MARVEL, and my astonishment at the continuance of SHOGUN WARRIORS. /(Perhaps you'd now like to express your astonishment at the undiscontinuation of Dracula?)/

Edward Tenniswood

I particularly enjoyed your Star Wars retrospective. I do agree, especially, that the opening scene with the Imperial Battle-Cruiser was indeed awesome, which might have inspired Redondo (whose Mind Wars strip, in the very sadly demised Starlord comic, was a triumph for Hebden, himself and British comics in general. I was surprised to read that the climax/conclusion had been shortened) and Ezquerra to use that type of scene, when fleets or groups of space-vessels enter the panel from the top and sides, seemingly reaching out into the vacuum with awesome size as was so admirably portrayed in Star Wars; the low hum (as with the climax to CE3K) of the fantastic vessel as it glides away from the mind-boggled viewer was also captivating. I must admit, however, that the planet-fall scene of R2D2 and C3PO in the escape pod was equally impressive, as the miniscule container sped towards Tatooine's surface and we saw the fabulous, incredibly realistic blue aura/atmosphere around the planet -- and the hyperspace jump by the Millenium Falcon made me jump, too!

I also agree that the two robots also didn't appeal to me as vigorously as the media and, seemingly, other public outcry made out.

Two points not mentioned in the article and which were not complimentary to the film were (a) the end of the Death-Star, which appeared as a physical embodiment of Darth Vader's unspeakable villainy, was, in my opinion, totally underwhelming. An object of that size and with the firepower to vaporize a planet should have made an audible noise in the vast vacuum of space at least--surely its power could defy the laws of physics. (b) The acting of Carrie Fisher most of the way through was pretty awful, mainly because her Women's Lib attitude came over too strongly for my liking, and her lack of humour also ruptured the act.

However, during the finale when the Princess hands out the "Jim'll Fix It" badges she appears to give Han a more vigorous 'eye' than the young Luke Skywalker, but although Han may well be more her age, the average viewer, accepting Luke as the hero, is left asking the theatre manager why the hero didn't get the gal!

Stephen Poppitt

Bem's new A4 size is a definite improvement. #22 had a very professional look about it, which happily was matched by the quality of the articles themselves. The only feature I didn't like was Pete Scott's analysis of Robert Crumb, in spite of which I thought the issue was a winner.

While I agree with Neil Poulton (Reaction) in what he says about fan apathy, I think that the main problem is that it's not particularly easy to write an interesting and thought-provoking letter. As Mike said, Reaction is one of the 'deeper' sections of Bem, and in my experience this depth is what has put me off writing to fanzines. Perhaps this is why a handful of mature fans tend to dominate. I'd be interested to know what the actual size of Reaction's mailbag is: do only a relatively small number of people write in, or do a lot of more juvenile letters have to be rejected in order to maintain a consistently high level in the column? /(We get about 30-40 letters for Reaction, out of which 15-20 are selected. I select many for rational discussion. In other words, the 'Wow the last issue of Bem was the best ever. Fan-Things was great. Sigh was great. Katholicity was great and the art was great' letters rarely see print, much to Martin's chagrin, though they are very heartening to receive. Please, tell us what you like/dislike, but also think, + write about some of the topics raised in Reaction. Is Reaction too heavy? Is a lighter, more humorous approach, more in keeping with the rest of Bem, in order?)/

Regarding fan apathy, it does seem that there must be a large section of comic collectors who have not been introduced to organised fandom. Certainly there seem to be very few girls involved apart from Misses James and Glancy. I think Alan Austin tried to attract more of the fair sex a while back, but without getting anywhere. /(You only think he didn't get anywhere. That's what he's been up to.)/ My own introduction to fandom was only through a chance acquaintance made in MWoM who introduced me to Comics Unlimited. Is it really the fan's fault for not getting involved in fandom if he doesn't know it exists -- take a look at D.R. Soulsby's letter in Bem-22. It needs a concerted effort to get through to the comic reader that something called fandom exists, and might benefit from his participation. /(One way of spreading the fandom gospel is by trying to give Fantasy Trader as wide a distribution as possible. Are you sure there are no bookshops/newsagents/college or university shops in your town that would take 10 or 20 copies?)/

Marvel's latest British 'Revolution' has turned out to be a predictable anti-climax, I see. Despite sacrificing the glossy cover and reducing the page count by a third in their weeklies the new-look mags still cost 10p. Some clever panel juggling--à la Power Comics--has resulted in more story per page than a straight reprint from the US colour comics, but has not offset the reduction to a mere 4 pages a week of each feature. The only compensation is that the abominable splash pages have been lost. Again following Power Comics, Dez Skinn has reverted to deleting

writer/artist credits (though they are included in the margins in places), in an attempt to conceal which of the strips are new material by British teams. The fact that in places I do actually find it impossible to tell which is British and which American I attribute to the sad condition of Marvel at the moment. In fact, 'The New Marvel Comic' (MWoM) and the brand-new 'Hulk' are a waste of time. 'Spider-Man Comic' is only saved by the fact that I originally missed the Avengers and FF stories in their own mags. Nevertheless it is the best of the three, though with bad Thor reprints, Nova (bad anywhere) and Sub-Mariner there's not a lot in it. Presumably the lead Spider-Man story (in #313) comes from the regular US Spider-Man -- I wouldn't know as I left that mag when Lee and Romita did--but if so it speaks volumes about the lack of talent at Marvel now. /(Actually, it came from May 1968's MARVEL SUPER-HEROES #14, by Stan Lee, Ross Andru & Bill Everett; did you miss that one? -ML)/ It should be interesting to see how long these new mags survive. I don't think they will sell, outside the bubble-gum brigade, and it wouldn't surprise me if by December only the two b/w monthlies remain.

One final point: it might be interesting to assess what Bem's readership thinks of Marvel and DC now, in the last year of the '70s, as compared with their view on the mags produced in the '60s, so how about a poll, Martin. /(We don't need a poll, but opinions expressed via Reaction might be interesting.)/

Harry McAvinchey

You mentioned that the Ruan Lanihorne E-Man pastiche would be featured in FT soon. Y'know...I had forgotten about that one! Seriously, it's been nearly 3 years since you sent me that story to illustrate for the aborted All Star Magazine/Bemusing Tales, back around the time of Bem-9. I could hardly believe it--15 Bems ago! You've come a long way. Whatever happened to that "Moonstone" 4-pager, eh? I'm sure some fanzine would be only too glad to fill up 4 pages with a Martin Lock/McAvinchey collaboration... wouldn't they...well, don't all rush!

As I've mentioned before, a lot of my work, some of it three years old now, is being held, unused, by fanzine editors; Alan Matheson, for example. I'm sure the art is safe, but that really doesn't help much. If after three years it hasn't seen print I'd prefer to handle it myself.

This kind of practise is damaging to both artists and fandom in general. On the one hand it can prove to be a discouragement to artists sending future work to fanzines, and fandom and fanzines will bear the brunt of this if artists are loathe to support them by sending in artwork. In my own case I am very wary, as the vast majority of my work is lying in suspension or worse, about whom I send work to now, preferring to retain complete control over what I consider to be my newer, better pieces. I know that other artists have had similar experiences--Luke Rainford for one. It got so frustrating that I practically gave up drawing for several months, and lost interest in contributing to all but the few "established" fanzines. /(But the established zines can also prove unreliable. I've sent articles or interviews to Ron Tiner for Eureka, Colin Campbell for Fantasy Advertiser, and Alan Austin for CU, none of which appeared due to the demise of the zines, and none of whom returned my work. If any zine editors can personally contact any of the above, try pestering them for unused material; they must have loads.)/

The time was right for a "Power Comics" article. The last one I read must have been in Heroes Unlimited, or even Merry Marvel Fanzine. Come to think of it--isn't it about time someone did an investigation on Tony Roche and Ges Cleaver? Maybe the Society could dig up an article on the "Whatever happened to these old fans..." lines. Might be interesting, at that. These guys were every bit as important in getting fandom started off at this end of the planet as Dez Skinn and the others. Christ, they really were enthusiastic. Well do I remember Ges's frantic letters--wish I'd kept 'em! Another idea would be a complete fanzine index, something like Mel Burns' COMIX INDEX listing all the fanzines, dates, and maybe spot artists if they rate comment. There were a lot of fanzines which deserve to be remembered; Thing for instance comes to mind, especially the last few issues. So there's really lots of scope for articles about comics fandom itself if we can somehow pool all the information together. Another seemingly forgotten item is the proposed Frank Bellamy checklist of a couple of years back. It never materialised, and it would be a valuable source for Bellamy collectors. /(With your knowledge you seem to be the perfect person to write a "History of Fandom" article.)/

Gordon Smith

Alan Wright mentions in his letter that he hopes the Superman movie does well, which it has, because the "future of comics may well depend on it." Well, if they're going to turn out like Superman, what comic fan wants it? The worst part of the movie is the laughable 'Deus ex Machina' device employed by Superman to reverse time, thereby saving Lois, which destroys any thinking fan's interest in Superman 2.

Say, for instance, the plot of Superman 2, which we know includes the Phantom Zone criminals, is that they blow up Metropolis, start a nuclear war and comprehensively ravage the world. All Supes has to do is whiz round the earth again, reverse time to when the Phantom Zone criminals hadn't committed their dirty deeds, bop them one, and that's it! Supes has saved the world again!

Another thought has just struck me. Why didn't Superman, in the actual film, reverse time back to before the missile blew up the San Andreas fault, thus avoiding the billions of dollars of damage to land and property, not to mention any poor soul who got killed? The large plot inconsistencies, as well as the unsatisfactory special effects, destroy the importance that the film could have had for comics. They did, however, get the right person, to play Superman.

Dean Smith mentions that we, as comic readers, would "over-react" if described as "morons", just as Alan Wright over-reacts. But don't we face that attitude now? The majority of people I know regard with some amusement the fact that I read comics, and periodically take the mick out of me, but, as long as they're not too vociferous or seriously insulting, it doesn't worry me at all. In that context, nothing that appeared in Captain Frog or in Reaction, apart from Les Chester's immature letter, has been "seriously insulting."

People who are part of a minority opinion or organisation must expect to be slated by a certain percentage of the majority, as well as tolerated/accepted by others, whether they read comics, are homosexual, or whatever, and resist the urge to defend views that need not be defended.

Now, Mike, why do you have to keep on picking on the four-eyed wonder, Nigel Balloch. It's pretty obvious the original sub of £2.40 was a break-even figure for a minimum number of people. The fact that Nigel found a cheaper printer and decided to absorb the losses of the society on his own back (I know he has to put a fiver in a week to the society at the moment) meant he could reduce the sub to a quid, thereby attracting more members to join, rather than chucking the whole idea in. Through gaining and nurturing the interest garnered by the society, the sub can now be raised to the break-even figure of £1.75 a year without a massive drop in membership. The society will, in a few months, be self-supporting, and still offer an informal and more accessible entrance for newcomers to fandom. /(I'm not "picking on" anyone; merely asking a question, which you, merci, answered. Now how about this one: why is the Society an informal and more accessible entrance into fandom than any other zine?)/

Chris Ash

I fear this is going to be a very long letter so, without further ado, allow me to compliment Brian Bolland on what must be the best British fanzine cover ever, certainly better than anything that's fronted CMN.

Most of the rest of this missive is addressed to Mike Cruden, and I would be most grateful Mike if you would refrain from responding until the end of same (or at least till the end of a section), as the non-existent dialogue you attempt to contrive is inevitably slanted in your favour. /(I'll restrict myself to the end of a section, and put up with any awkwardness that ensues. The dialogue does exist, viz: you "talk" to me, and I immediately "talk" back, then you talk some more in the next issue: Dialogue, yes? For the second time this issue it's alleged that answering gives me the edge, as though we're trying to score points off each other, rather than evolve some meaningful discussion.)/

To take the most trivial point first, in answer to the question posed at the end of the 3rd paragraph of my letter in Bem #23, I would merely draw your attention to clues contained in the 3rd letter of Bem #21's 'Reaction' and page 9 of Bem #23. /(It might have been easier, though far less fun, for Chris simply to state that his favourite u/g artist is Hunt Emerson and his favourite dj is Gambo.)/

As for the glib dismissal of points raised concerning "Superman--the Movie", try reading Mike Tiefenbacher's excellent appraisal of the film (TCR #165) which was written a few weeks after my letter, and makes the same points plus several others besides. /(I'm not sure I did glibly dismiss your points, I thought I answered + discussed where I could, but if I did, I'm sorry.)/

Now the real reason for my writing this letter is your suggestion that I should go away and read "Thrillkill" and "A View From Without" as these would somehow change my attitude towards comics.

Despite my unfortunate and uncontrollable loathing for teachers (it's a reflex action, honest) and the rebellious attitude I still nurture towards their kind to this day, I decided to obey your instruction and, indeed, my worst suspicion was confirmed.

"Thrillkill", in fact, was the very story which caused me to solemnly vow never to buy another Warren until a fundamental change in editorial policy took place. This strip makes me sick to my stomach. For anyone who has not enjoyed the questionable pleasure of perusing this piece, I shall describe it for you.

The text consists of a dialogue between a newspaper reporter and a radical ex-clergyman. The interview concerns a former altar-boy who became a mass murderer. During the course of this interview we are told how the boy was "bright"..."logical" ..."affectionate"... of "the fine job (murder) Bobby did"..."not the muddled thoughts of a deranged mind, or the mental fallout of a psychotic."

The final lines of the story, which are supposed to justify the mayhem wrought; "he hoped to find a better place. Now, at least, he didn't have to go alone", are the most absurdly sickening of all. This bright, logical, affectionate boy apparently killed all those people so that they might journey with him to Heaven. This would only make sense if their deaths were simultaneous with his end, since they weren't, would there not already be a sufficient number of people there to provide companionship? Also, since when does a bright, logical, affectionate altar-boy believe that the passport to Heaven is mass murder and suicide?

The only message discernable from this whole sadistic, repulsive mess is that killing and maiming indiscriminately are justifiable so long as you had an alcoholic father who beat you up a lot. Oh yeah, and, as with other Adams jobs of the period, that nebulous fiend "Society" was largely responsible for this atrocity too. In fact, writer Jim Stenstrum is not afraid to name names: Mark Spitz, Richard Nixon, Sears-Roebuck, Jack Anderson, Pepsi-Cola--even Queen Elizabeth II, are all fearlessly indicted. And all of this, according to Mike Cruden, constitutes "serious artistic endeavour". Not only that but "Society" is taken to task for shooting this boy down after he had killed 9 people. /(I think Stenstrum would be very sad if he ever saw your interpretation. Almost deliberately, you seem to refuse to look beneath the surface events of the story, just as society did. The point was that society (pointlessness, stress, materialism etc) drove a "bright, logical, affectionate boy" over the edge, then cured him by killing him. His murders aren't justifiable, but neither is his murder. The final lines are not supposed to justify the mayhem; they merely serve to explain the undeniable logic of an insane mind. It's difficult, and almost an insult, to try to capsule a story like that with a quote, but if I had to, this one would serve well: "Perhaps he was afraid of becoming like his father (a violent drunkard) or maybe he simply feared becoming a man with responsibilities in a world he couldn't possibly hope to cope with.")/

And as for the drawings, Neal Adams has rendered this job in his typical, overblown, grotesquely exaggerated, super-butch style which, combined with the subject matter, can only contrive an end product which immediately appears cheap and nasty; none of the murder victims being allowed any dignity in death.

Indeed, Adams has apparently revelled in at least two of the assassination depictions, which seem to have become for him sensuous labours of love. This is the same Neal Adams, I might add, who complains in TCJ #43 that he wouldn't want his 10-year-old son reading a comic in which Green Arrow killed a bad guy. I was not aware that there was an embargo on the sale of Warrens to those under the age of 18. But, besides that, what is to stop Adams' own son from wandering into his father's studio at any time? Unless, of course, Dad is too ashamed to allow him entry. /("Overblown": where? The panel layout is very ordinary. There is little dramatic foreshortening. The story was depicted in a matter-of-fact newsreel style; cinematic (but what good comics art isn't), but never flashy. "Grotesquely exaggerated": where? Grotesque? Yes, the deaths were grotesque; the people didn't die very neatly, but violent death isn't particularly neat. "Super-butch". Wha? The protagonist looked somewhat skinny. The women weren't Chesty Morgans. "Cheap and nasty". No, meticulous and effectively, chillingly nasty. No "dignity in death." I can't recall any newspaper reports mentioning the dignity of the victims of murderers, rapists, muggers or motor cars. The point Neal was making in mentioning Green Arrow was that the hero took a life, i.e. cured by killing, which made killing seem condonable; an acceptable answer to crime, and in some cases sickness. "Thrillkill" suggests that there is an alternative to killing, and that all the deaths in the story were pointless and unnecessary. I don't think Neal would have minded his son seeing the story, providing he ensured he understood it.)/

The same interview mentions "A View From Without". Now I only have the original presentation of this in "Phase 1" (1971) but I presume it's the same version as the one I was instructed to seek out.

For anyone unfamiliar with this strip, it is basically an indictment of warfare in Viet Nam, punctuated by photographs of the artist/writer (Neal Adams) with funny eyebrows and Wally Wood lighting.

While I would immediately recognise this as a worthier attemot at being worthy, it bears the typical Adams trademark of excessiveness. The photographs of Adams as the alien narrator, for instance, are totally superfluous and only succeed in trivialising the message which, in itself, would probably have been more effective as a single picture or a piece of prose, wherein the reader would visualize a more personal, intense, animated image built up syllable by syllable.

I have no hesitation in admitting that human dignity has been successfully depicted here however, possibly because Adams isn't drawing his fellow Americans; merely their victims.

Incidentally, the very same Phase 1 contains a strip by former D.C. Thomson artist Ken Barr, which is definitely a more effective anti-war piece. /(I agree that the photos of Neal were irritating, but I can't see why the message should be more effective as a single picture (which would eliminate the story, especially the cumulative agonies suffered by the child) or a piece of prose (whereby we would have lost the powerful graphics). Leaving the visualization up to the reader infers that every reader's imagination is superior to Adams'.)/

Perhaps I should now stop and explain what I meant by "serious artistic endeavour": "Serious art" is something which artists create for their fellow artists, and is one of the reasons why the contemporary fine-art mainstream has passed right out of the public gaze. What, for instance, do the public care of Conceptual Art or Photo-realism? You yourself, Mike, in Bem #23 mention the Tate and its good old famous pile of bricks. Believe me, that pile is just the tip of the brickberg. If mainstream comics were ever to adopt such serious artistic pretensions, then we would all have to look for another hobby. Likewise, if they all adopted the sadistic, sensationalist attitudes you appear to be promoting. /(No, I'm not promoting sadistic, sensationalist attitudes. I'm promoting intelligent writing coupled with a high standard of illustration. It's unfortunate the two stories I suggested both contained a lot of violence. For me, successful serious art is a serious attempt at creative expression executed with a high degree of competence. Most comics are not serious art, because the intentions of the artist and writer

are not to impress us with their abilities, but simply to earn a living via entertainment. Serious Art is serious art with a message. Breugal, Dali etc were serious Artists, but many artists only merit a small a. They were technicians who provided material which satisfied the eyes, but not the brain. "Thrillkill" is serious Art, though it's not as successful as "Peasant Dance". Artists creating art for artists sounds very elitist, so why should the public care about it. People will usually only take an interest in that which they can relate to. Dabbling with technique is interesting for the dabblers, but should be a means to an end, not an end in itself.)/

What worries me though, and correct me if I'm wrong, is that I have always been led to believe that you are engaged in the profession of educating children. I can only hope that the sort of mentality which can devour all those new DCs and Marvels each month would hardly be capable of teaching anyone over the age of 6, and that the poor kids have therefore got a fighting chance of recovering from your influence prior attaining adulthood. /(I wonder what provoked this, and your other earlier, attack on teachers generally and me personally. I don't devour all the new Marvels and DCs, merely read, generally enjoy and sometimes appreciate the better ones, which I'm sure I don't need to list. Most teachers (about 75%, according to research) read for pleasure very seldom, so presumably they fill their leisure time by watching television, which intellectually I'd place on the same stratum as junk comics. The percentage is higher for graduates (about 90%). What is it exactly that you think there is in reading comics which inherently makes a person a poor teacher?)/

Now to weightier matters. Lewis Stringer's Power Comics essay proved that it is possible to include several factual errors in a short article on something which took place little over 10 years ago. It would possibly be a bit unfair to compare this feature with Steve Moore's "Power Failure" epitaph in "Eureka" back in '71, as Steve was obviously in a better position to appreciate the political powerplays behind the publishing scenes. However, I would have liked to have seen a few words expressed on the subject of Ddhams' appalling paste-ups. I'll never forget the time, for instance, when some hack on their staff gave Iron Man two eyeballs in one eye, purely because the cretin didn't realize he was extending a picture of an eye. Then there was the incredible job they did on Henry Pym's right shoulder once in a featurette on Giant Man's powers. It was even worse than the deformed left shoulder Martin gave Gambo by extending the picture of him on page 9 (for which I've already apologised to him).

For years I've been waiting for Messrs Parkhouse, Moore, Skinn or someone to blow the gaff on exactly what Barry Smith's contribution to those paste-ups was. Only one Powerhouse Pin-Up for instance is unmistakably a Smith job -- the one on the back of Fantastic #65. /(Smith drew quite a few of those pin-ups. I've seen about 5 originals, courtesy of Dez Skinn, very much in the style of that X-Men issue Smith did.)/

As I expected, the length of this letter is getting beyond a joke, despite the fact that there are several more comments I could make.

Don Macleod

Having read that Pete Scott feels CE3K was profound, and traumatic, I dread reading his upcoming opinion-piece on the film. I think I can anticipate precisely the type of thing he has written--almost but not quite as naive as Ray Bradbury's piece in Starburst.

In my view the film propounds fraudulent optimism of the worst kind. It presents in a slickly packaged way the simplistic but, of course, highly popular notion that everything is going to be all right, no matter what. To say "Oh, but what about the FX--they're incredible" is merely to praise the packaging (form over content). The FX are incredible. So is the "message" of the film. A 'deus ex machina' end to human conflict!

This film makes me sick. Sick in particular at the gullibility of SF fans. We all know about the general public, but aren't SF fans supposedly more discerning? Ha! They can't even recognise a quick buck being made.

CE3K is as much exploitation as is the cheapest sex'n'violence flick. The only difference is that pie-in-the-sky mysticism has greater "market penetration capability" than sex and violence. So a lot of money was invested in the film -- only because a correspondingly large return was expected. Exploitation on the largest scale ever.

This film fulfils the same purpose as the Bee Gees music; placating and satisfying the audience without posing any challenge to their beliefs or blind assumptions. I think Spielberg & Co had their potential audience well-sussed before making this film. To paraphrase Harry Harrison (from his preface to John Brosnan's FUTURE TENSE), it is like giving narcotics to children. Close Encounters is not really science fiction at all, to my mind; it merely looks like it. I hope somebody out there feels the same way. /(How about that: a LoC on an article at the same time as it's printed. Instant appraisal.)/

Gleitzman I could rave about; almost on a par with Thundermole, one of the most masterfully paced strips I've read -- and that's a compliment. It should strike a chord with anyone who's ever practised keeping up with the Joneses--teenage sex experience style!

Haven't seen Superman yet (check out my latitude) but I expect to enjoy it. Why? All the silly people have said the expected silly things about it and the sensible people (take a bow, Cruden) /(Ow, my head!)/ persuade me it's probably worth seeing.

I stand corrected by Theo on the Gormenghast subject. However, just to be persistent, don't you think a new interpretation of a book, be it in comics or on film, should be just that, a new interpretation. Hopefully one offering fresh images; either reinforcing or altering the reader's original conception. It should definitely not be purely a lavish reconstruction of the original, enjoyable as that might be.

To proceed a little off the subject, which was nebulous enough to begin with, the most interesting thing to me about fresh treatments of any subject is the insight provided into the mind of the interpreter. This insight can only be afforded, of course, if the subject matter is sufficiently challenging to begin with. /(But many people regard any interpretation which deviates from the original as an insult to the original creator, usually an author. I've got mixed feelings. The 'jaws' film was superior to the book, because the clumsy sex scenes (only inserted at the insistance of the publisher) were eliminated, + ditto for 'Day of the Jackal' (what a comment on publishers, that they can't conceive of a book being commercially successful unless it's got a liberal dollup of sex in it.). The Bond films are very enjoyable, but I wish they would get back to the tense, authentic world Fleming created, best filmised in 'Dr No'.)/

May I close by saying that Hagar The Horrible is a ource of constant inspiration to me, an far more worthy in every way than Close Encounters of the Third Kind? A minority of one, you think? Ah, surely not...

Dean Smith

Thanks for Bem 23, another good issue, all round, with a very striking cover --but I'll come back to that in a moment.

First I'd like to answer Mike's comment at the end of my last letter. No, I don't mean we'd all go crazy if we didn't read comics. But I do feel that some kind of release from the mundane world is a necessary part of life, and comics are as valid a way of achieving this as any other medium. /(So true.)/

Incidentally, in some research into dreaming carried out in the States it was discovered that if people are stopped from dreaming they quickly have nervous breakdowns, hallucinations, etc. One can only speculate what would happen if people had no access to some medium of dramatic (in its original sense) expression.

Speaking of dreams brings me to Pete Scott's comments about the Superman movie. I think it's precisely because Superman is a personification of these kinds of fantasy/dream images that his comic has managed to keep going in the face of some of the worst writing, artistry and editing in the history of comics. Super-strength and the power of flight are two of the most common archetypes and appear most frequently during the time of puberty and just before. That is the age-group of 9 to 12 year-olds--the age-group comics are supposedly aimed at. Though these images taper off after puberty, they do tend to recur throughout our adult life.

In his book, 'Hero With a Thousand Faces', J. Campbell compares the actions of the hero who fails to complete his heroic task with the compulsive behaviour of the neurotic. Perhaps this explains why many older fans don't buy Superman on a regular basis--he is after all stuck at a stage of development, in that he can never complete his union with the "anima" figure (Lois Lane) of his own mythology. Once the reader has passed this stage in his own development he can no longer sympathise with Superman, but only see his behaviour as neurotic--whereas Spider-Man of course admits he's neurotic, so the hook becomes "will he get past it or not". I don't know about Stan's writing though. Does he put all those influences/ingredients in consciously, or not? If it is conscious, he's shrewder and better read than I usually give him credit for, if it's unconscious he's a much better writer than I give him credit for, and why isn't he writing novels! /(Somebody should ask him both these questions sometime. Perhaps they have, but until someone unearths the answers, I'll guess; yes, he did insert Shakespearian, Freudian influences deliberately, and, comics rather than novels because the former are more immediate, probably more exciting, perhaps more stimulating (to the creator), and therefore more suited to his personality.)/

I quite agree with Alan Cookson's comments about some of Colin Campbell's prices --though to be fair Colin does provide a good service and his books are of reasonable value. But charging different prices for comics priced in cents or pence is one of the silliest things I've come across. No doubt it will catch on in some quarters! And how can Theo Clarke defend another dealer for charging high prices on the grounds that they deal mainly with European customers? The logical end to that argument is that American dealers should charge English clients more for comics they know haven't been distributed here! At least then Alan Cookson would have nothing to complain about. In the meantime I shall carry on using the same handy rule of thumb I always use -- if I think the price is too high I don't buy--and I don't care who the dealer is.

The rest of the issue this time round, though good, was rather lightweight. After quite an interesting article last time, this issue's Made In America tended to be a calendar of events, which tends to get a bit boring. /(Didn't the comments stave off any possible listishness?)/

The Great Gambo Gambit was a letdown too. I was hoping for something interesting, but it just rambled on going nowhere. Then to get to the end and be told the whole thing had been an excuse for Chris Ash to talk to his favourite D.J. about music & radio made me feel cheated. I'd rather have had a poor piece about music & radio than a nothing piece about comics --I'm sure Paul could have had some interesting things to say about comics, especially EC, The Flash and early fandom. /(Listening to the reminiscences of old-timer Paul Gambi (would he have become a tailor if he hadn't become a deejay?) was quite fascinating. But perhaps Chris could persuade Paul to expand on some of his memories?)/

Which, leaving aside the regular columns (and one of these days I must send off for some of the Fan Things that Ed Sallis recommends), leaves the Power Comics article, which was good enough, but could have done with a bit more info about what stories were reprinted and a bit more about the Missing Link/Johnny Future story. Also more could have been said about those terrible "old codgers" type answers on the editorial pages. Speaking of which I remember my first fan letters, terribly cut, were in some of those comics. I seem to remember they sent a Thor tee-shirt for each letter printed. Mine wore out only a couple of years ago. They built things to last in those days. /(I was surprised Lew didn't mention that Luis Bermejo (he of Warren, notably Rook, fame) drew the Missing Link. Also that Steve Moore was an ass. ed. (yes, he had an ed like an ass), and had to pose in one of those very t-shirts you mention.)/

The thought of Maggie Thatcher is enough to make me shudder, but as the Earth-Mother Matriarch--ye gods. It's enough to make anyone a male chauvinist of the first order.

Referring back to Colin Campbell, I'm not too keen on the idea of moving the comic con to Birmingham. Though I can agree with his reasons for doing so, it puts it right out of my price range, and I think of many other fans. It will be interesting to see what happens. And, rumour has it, there will be an alternative con this summer in London with Jim Starlin as guest. I'll believe it when I see it, but if I see it I'll go. /(The move to Brum is fine by me, reducing my travelling by half, and eliminating hotel bills (I'll stay with my Wolverhampton in-laws). But surely a Brum, i.e. centre-of-the-country, location is more sensible?)/

John Murphy

I'm not sure why, but Bem 23 just wasn't up to its usual standard. The Brian Bolland cover was great for starters, and the 2000 A.D. covers were a pleasant change from the same old American covers. There seemed to be a lack of decent large illoes for some reason. I'm the type who needs a good illo to brighten up a page.

This was the first issue where I've been disappointed by "Made In America". In the past I've enjoyed this column because I knew so little about the pre-60s comics, and the info that H.P.S. packed in was astonishing, but this time although it was informative I knew most of the stuff already. "The Great Gambo Gambit" was so boring I didn't bother to finish it. Maybe Chris Ash should stick to drawing.

Now here's something that I know there is going to be a lot of discussion about, the Comic Con at the Birmingham N.E.C. All those American pros are very tempting, and for three days, but I'm sure that it is going to be too commercial. The fiver entrance fee may still be a bargain, but the comic prices must rocket. Most alarming perhaps is the cost of <u>one</u> table, £32 for a centre, or £40 for a wall position. As far as I remember, all the cheap comix I bought were purchased from single tables from people who were probably flogging their collections. These table prices are bound to turn them away, while other dealers will stick whopping big prices on their comics "for the occasion". Even with these complaints, 50% off train fares if I book in advance is enough to make me go. Maybe I can prove myself wrong. Is there any possibility of Steranko or any of the other artists attending the con running their own tables and flogging off sketches at set prices?

I'm sure that George Perez runs or draws a fanzine of sorts. Can anybody tell me where to obtain it, or what it's called? /(It's called "Perez--With the Accent on the First E", and an inquiry to Colin Campbell should provide results.)/

Fan-Things was as good as I always expect it. I hope it forces...whoops, I hope it encourages people to buy Vertigo #4 and all the back issues. They really are EXCELLENT.

Finally, I'll end with a happy note. Katholicity was superb! Why oh why does she waste space writing supposedly funny crap when she can turn out a nice serious piece like this on the brainwashing of Quicksilver. Well done.

Barry K. Winetrobe

Reaction is certainly living up to its name--so much so that the editorial had to hint strongly that the 'gay' argument should be curtailed. Thank goodness for that; letters composed of opinions based on 'O' level Biology and Psychology, mixed with a liberal (sic) sprinkling of prejudice or paranoia, tend to get a bit tedious.

Much more interesting is the running battle between Mike and Nigel Balloch. I have always been a strong supporter of some form of comix society to organise fandom, and, to that extent, I welcome Nigel's <u>TSOCE</u> (however much I may dislike the actual name of the society). True, much of my support stems from a vague feeling that any body of like-minded people <u>should</u> band together; the practicalities of what the group can or should do is a secondary, though vital, matter. The mere fact of having a body, representative of all or most of fandom, is very useful in putting forward a unified viewpoint to those concerned re comics prices, distribution, marts, zines etc. It is from that basic representational foundation that a comics society can best progress to its more active functions, be they production of zines, organising marts, or obtaining discounts. /(Isn't the "unified viewpoint", if there is such a thing, presented in the larger print-run zines, such as Bem, and eventually FT?)/

The problem with TSOCE seems to be that it has been based on the reverse criterion, and it must seem to many people, members or not, that the Society exists purely as a financial base for Nigel's fan-publishing activities. While the membership is growing steadily, it is still only about 150 or so, and thus appears to be just another comic club -- like the X-Men Fan Club, which has had, by the way, astonishing membership success.

I think Mike would have fewer objections to TSOCE if it tried to transform itself into a more loosely based (perhaps federal) body, with either no, or purely nominal, membership fees. Membership could be granted automatically to all dealers and their customers, conventioneers, zine readers, and so on. Initially the Society's publication should be restricted to a regular newsletter to all members, giving news and comment on comics and fandom in general, and the society in particular. Only then should it develop its other activities, the first of which could be the compilation of a complete index of British dealers, shops, zines and marts, available to all members. /(Your automatic membership + index ideas are good, but how would the society's newsletter be financed? Donations from marts, zines, dealers?)/

Mike, perhaps you may believe that all this is unnecessary, preferring a totally de-centralised, disorganised fandom (eg your dislike of Price Guides in the last issue's Reaction). But I do believe that, if nothing else, there should be available to all fans a body or society which can (a) adequately represent them and their views, when necessary, and (b) present them with up-to-date, reliable comix and fandom info, when required. /(Would you say fandom is disorganised at the moment? Perhaps only because many comic fans are ignorant of its existance, a situation which the blanket coverage of FT may rectify. Your (a) and (b) requirements are already satisfied by Bem, via the letter-col and the news.)/

Geoff Lamprey

The failure of this letter to see print will be like that guy in the Watergate affair who didn't answer to signify yes to a question. /(In other words, you dare us to print it.)/

The reason for this is misuse of pen names. Now I use a pen name; Hunter Tremayne and Maureen James are pen names, among others. Often as not the reason for using them is to avoid embarrassment from relatives, an unattractive non-commercial name, or something which is easier to spell. I'll go one step further when producing a fanzine, and say that to avoid the look of an editorzine several pen names can be used. Ed Sallis is very obvious, from the "Fan-Things" title. Some, like Alan Wright, are not, and introducing controversy for the sake of it smells slightly, although interesting for the reaction--unless you went out to fool Mike Cruden as well -- which makes him rather weak as the LoC editor for not detecting a fake. The name Martin Lock now has some respectability within fandom, and doesn't require as many pennames as being used; phase them out, or find real people to do these if you want to avoid open embarrassment. The reason for this is largely due to adverts I've seen with remarks from Ed Sallis and Martin Lock, which is not only misleading but also signifies a misinterpretation of the product (in this case, a fanzine editor who probably isn't aware of your duality). Also from your editorial I think you are becoming a bit tiresome of these rôles. So phase them out.

Since I'm not sure that you'll print the above or decide to prove me wrong that they do exist--in which case I'd like to see photos of these people then either in Bem or sent to me. The above paragraph is criticizing a major mistake that you made not to the quality of Bem, which is always interesting. /(The only reason we'd fake a letter is if Reaction's reactions were falling, which they aren't, and weren't. Certainly neither of us would have been so cunning as to dream up a letter like Alan's first. I may be getting on a bit, but unless Martin can adopt two entirely different handwriting styles, I'm not fooled that easily. I hope you feel as silly as you should.)/

/(To which I add that, to the best of my knowledge, Alan Wright is real; I can certainly forward a letter to the address I send his Bems to. Could you let us know how you reached the conclusion that he didn't exist and that I had, therefore, found it necessary to invent him? On the more general subject of pen-names, it is I suppose no secret that I have in the past operated, and still do operate to a lesser extent now, various pseudonyms. There may be a danger of duality becoming duplicity--but trying to maintain a secret identity can be fun. Beats me how Superman has managed it for 40 years, though! Two reasons for using pen-names you don't cover are, firstly, to let material stand on its own merits, free of association with other work, and, secondly, to avoid having two stories (or whatever) by the same name on the same contents page--I've got an old SF pulp which boasts stories by both Alfred Coppel and Derfla Leppoc, as a rather extreme example. I'm not sure what you mean by saying an ad quoting both me (from a letter) and Ed (from Bem-22) "signifies a misinterpretation of the product", but if you want to continue this in regular correspondence, maybe you can persuade me of the error of my ways. -ML)/

Kathleen Glancy

Be still, my fluttering heart! Mike cares about me. I care about you too, Mike, though not so much as I care about Sue. I <u>worry</u> about Sue -- fancy having to sleep with a man who identifies with the Wolverine--who might any night dream that he <u>is</u> the Wolverine, and try to gut her. /(With my bitten-down nails I wouldn't be very successful. Besides, Sue's usual method of waking me, a sharp jab in the ribs, would soon calm me. It's when I start to identify with that well-known barbarian super-stud (no, not Nige Edwards, the other one) she really gets worried.)/

All right then, briefly--that guard did not <u>have</u> to be killed, simply because he was no threat. Had he been a super-being, yes. Had he been armed with a powerful weapon, yes. But a poor ignorant savage with a spear -- what could he conceivably have done against three powerful mutants? (Nightcrawler, incidentally, demonstrated a short time later that he could have handled the guard without killing, but just as effectively.) No, I don't think all soldiers are psychopaths. But if a soldier went out of his way unnecessarily to destroy a helpless enemy, then that soldier is a psychopath. Especially if he did it because he likes killing, and did it in cold blood, not in a fit of hysteria. And as I thought, Storm and Nightcrawler are not reacting normally. They see Wolverine perform a brutal murder. So Storm thinks how he's part of her family now, and Nightcrawler says those who know him are <u>lucky</u>. <u>They</u> are supposed to be sane. However, I approve of the Wolverine/Mariko affair. Simply because I can't wait to see what Sunfire will say when he finds out about it. /(It was paramount that the guard be disposed of silently; hence Wolverine's action. What about all those war films when the U.S. army heroes stealthily slit the throats of the German or Japanese camp guards, just prior to rescuing the scientific genius whose latest discovery is crucial to the outcome of the war?)/

Nope, you didn't fool me on the Vision. I took your first comment to mean "aren't the Vision's present scripters making him boring" which seems to be more or less what you did mean. /(Indeed, I did.)/ Incidentally, is it my lurid imagination, or has the Scarlet Witch got a whole lot fonder of Hawkeye than she ever used to be? Hopefully, she is only looking for a substitute brother, the one she was born with being a bit unsatisfactory, but if not the Vision could have some very interesting problems to contend with.

David Bingham's splendid common sense puts us all to shame. So on the vexed 'gay' question I would only say two things. First, 'poof' in the USA means only a sound effect indicative of something appearing or vanishing in a cloud of smoke. American language is fraught with these little linguistic problems--witness the use of 'Wank' (as a racial term, roughly equivalent to Pommy) in Red Sonja's debut story in Conan, and also the appearance of a character called Sod in Guardians of the Galaxy. /(Are you sure about that "wank" reference? I presumed it was a bit of a nudge-nudge from Bazza Smith.)/ Second, Alan Wright might like to know that an independent Hollywood film group have announced plans to film "The Gay Superman". Though maybe he won't like to know--I strongly doubt that it will be a serious or sensitive treatment of homosexuality.

Ah yes, Mr Harwood. Herbie grew up and went to work for Black Goliath. Don't tell me you missed it.

Neil Jackson

The main reason for my writing is Alan Cookson's letter about Colin Campbell's stock split. I wrote to Colin condemning this action; he wrote back saying he can not accept my condemnation, as he gets too many orders specifying American issues only. From that I will not condemn Colin, he is only fulfilling a need. I will condemn those fans who do specify American issues -- if any of them are Bem readers, perhaps they'll tell us why? I get the feeling that it's because the fans themselves think they're more valuable. I have a pile of mint condition Atlas number ones with no price mark on them, does this mean they may be worth more than 5p each? /(I wonder which fan demanded that Colin charge £1.35 more for the cents version of STAR WARS 2. Wouldn't a mere 25p have sufficed? All this double-talk about blaming the fans strikes me as somewhat ...bullish.)/

Out of interest, how many fans find themselves justifying their comic buying by telling people the investment potential?

Talking of investment, I will condemn Colin on being the first English dealer I have seen to start writing about comics being a great investment in his sales list -- though I admit I do not have that much experience of dealers lists.

An American friend of mine who came over here a couple of years ago described British fandom as "Two or three years behind America, but gaining fast.

Perhaps we've caught up now?

Stephen Bailey

If enlarging the print means axing or shortening features in Bem -- forget it! Un-American Activities, Reg Uspatoff (who is he?), and The Worlds Of Emlock all had to go. Also smaller print makes a page look neater. I don't know what other readers think, but I say "Small Print For Bem!" What do you say, Mike? /(Grurztll-zbk1lYESktm)/

So let's have a look at Bem-23, and what made it the second-best issue yet (≠22 is top on my list). The Bolland cover was ace, I hope Brian returns to drawing everyone's favourite judge in 2000 A.D. shortly. I see that Marvel are cutting back their monthly and bi-monthly titles. Good. Now, if they could put all their effort into 20-odd comics a month, they might just improve.

A return of Page 4 Funnies? Great! Bem didn't get where it is today without Page 4 Funnies! Super! The only thing I can say about the Ultra-Man strip, I think, is "Yig!" By the way...what does Yig mean? I can't find it in English, French, or Latin dictionaries! /(Yig is giy backwards of course -- thought everyone would have spotted that.)/

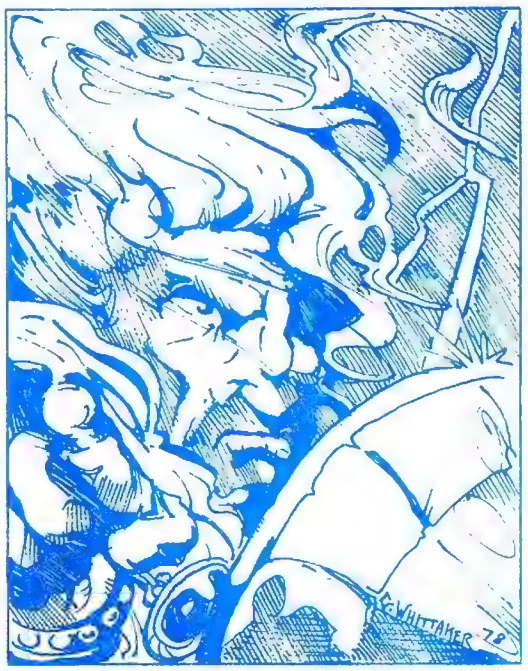
I agree with Ruan's comments that World War 2 has become part of 20th century mythology. War sells well, so it must be popular. Katholicity is a waste of space! All it is is a glorified letter, which should be edited and fitted into Reaction with comments stuck on it. I enjoy what the column has to say sometimes...but not often enough! So Nige Edwoods is back in town is he? Good, now if someone could get him to do another Weird Trash!

In Dez Skinn's "Hulk Comic" (if only it had a better title) I noticed that the Hulk grunts more than he talks...a TV cash-in if ever I saw one. Also the quality of the "comic" is cheap, but it is far too expensive. "Star Wars Weekly" has 4 more pages, including a glossy cover, for the same price.

"Dan Dare" is the subject for a new ATV or ITC tv series, 13 episodes in all, to be shown late this year or in early 1980 I think. Now the bad news! It features the 50s & 60s version, not the version we now know from 2000 A.D., with Digby and Peabody and the rest of the geriatrics.

TORNADO looks promising. I'm glad to see that IPC are giving their magazines a subject--2000 A.D. to sci-fi, TORNADO to heroes, and BATTLE-ACTION to war. This is better than chucking a load of "adventure" strips into one comic, as in THE CRUNCH, which I reviewed last time.

The 2000 A.D. cover reproductions are a great idea -- keep them up if possible.



Mat Coward

I seem to have missed out an issue of Bem, which means i'm a bit out of step with the great controversy of the moment, i.e. should homosexuals be treated as humans or as reptiles. I remember thinking of Alan Wright's original letter in ≠21 that it was good to see somebody raising rather more serious questions about comics than is the norm in lettercols, at the risk of incurring the wrath and shock-horror of an extremely conservative minded fandom.

As i say, i missed Bem-22, and therefore didn't read the first crop of replies; including that of Les Chester. If, however, his remarks and sentiments were accurately reported by contributors to Bem-23's Reaction, then he is clearly the flawed one around here. If any pity is necessary, then it should not be wasted on the gays--who clearly have no need nor want of it--but should be reserved for the unfortunate Mr Chester, as there is nothing funny about being, through no fault of your own, a narrow-minded bigot in a world where such people are frowned upon by the rest of us 'normals'.

Nobody, it seems, was willing to support Alan's remarks unreservedly. Those that came near to it inevitably preceded their remarks with disclaimers like "whilst i think Alan takes the subject too seriously", or else implied that they themselves are, of course, huge, manly sand-kickers, who just happen to have jolly broad minds, and their girl-friends love them for it.

I don't understand this idea, in many of the letters, that Alan is over-reacting as a gay liberationist, or that he is approaching the subject in a "humorless" way. The very underlying basis of the man's personality, his sexuality, is being oppressed and perverted by society; i think he has every right to be humorless about it. Nobody tells us to break into fits of giggles about the oppression of black southern Africa..."Did you hear the one about Steve Biko's widow, and two small children? HAHAHA!" "No, but i heard about the 13-year old girl beaten to death in Soweto! HOHOHO!" "But seriously now, folks..."

The fact that Alan is able to retain his sanity, and write very sensible letters to zines (far more sensible than any of the 'anti' letters in Bem-23), shows that he is a better man than i am, Gunga Dhin. If you were told that the most essential and unchangeable part of your character was sick and dirty, and that you could never wear it on your sleeve, and make noises about it like all the other blokes, would you still be able to sit there, slipping your smug little brackets in between the dainty pink type of a Reaction col? Personally, i reckon i'd end up in a hospital for schizophrenics.

One last point on this; "I could go into Alan's letter deeper, but i really don't feel Bem is the place to do it", says Frank P, and you seem to agree. But why not? If that's what people want to write about. It certainly makes a change from "I think £3 million is too much to pay for Ghost Rider 909", and "DC only write for kids". Any media has an enormous effect on the way our attitudes develop, comics no less than any other; and if the preservation of anachronistic stereotypes by comics offends some people -- it offends Alan, it offends me, and have you ever wondered why there are so few women in fandom?--it is only right that we, as the serious, critical section of the comics readership, should discuss fully all such issues. I say more power to your pen, Alan; and Mike, please don't bring down the curtain on this debate. /(Right. Deep breath. The reason I considered that Bem was not the place to discuss homosexuality was because I thought that a fairly large proportion of Bem's readers are adolescents, going through a difficult and confusing sexual phase themselves, and I wouldn't want the responsibility of having influenced a half homosexual into becoming a full one, or a bona fide homosexual into suppressing his natural sexuality. However, perhaps I was wrong. Perhaps such adolescents need all the guidance they can get, and Bem is unlikely to influence anyone in any way whatsoever. The fact is, many fans are thoroughly sick of this debate, and both Martin and I feel it's gone on long enough; so, unless anything particularly new is mentioned, or unless anyone violently objects to my having "the last word", this issue should indeed see the curtain lowered on the debate. And, to exercise my perogative (that's got yer nasty little minds going, hasn't it), my last word is to admit that letters like Mat's have changed my views considerably --which is what locing is all about, once we can step off our egotrips. I've previously felt uncomfortable about and unappreciative of any comedian who gets cheap laughs at the expense of blacks, and will now feel the same way about those who deride homosexuals. How about you, Les?)/

Bem-23 as a whole was excellent; clearly printed, with so much reading, and all the strips were good, especially Gleitzman; though i sincerely hope that Captain Frog gets his legs torn off by a homicidal chef during his vacation, and is therefore invalided out. Though, come to think of it, that never stopped Chief Ironside...

As a great Powerhouse fan, I remember proudly wearing my free Amazing Spider-Man iron-on tee-shirt transfer when i was 7, and swinging from dustbin to dustbin.

On the whole i think Bem is the best around at the moment, as i haven't seen a CU or Panny for ages; i hear that Alan and George have come out in sympathy with The Times. /(I'd heard it was the other way around.)/

Les Chester

Stop me if you've heard this one: "Reading BEM is the most fun you can have with your clothes on." Seriously, BEM just keeps getting better and better, and in my eyes is far and away the best fanzine in the market (I'll have to make my peace with Richard Burton by pointing out that CMN is a newszine as opposed to a fanzine). The question is, Martin, how long can you keep it up? Only the Shadow--and Maureen James -- know.

I seem to have touched a few raw nerves with my last letter to BEM (unintentionally, of course). I don't want to fill BEM's pages with explanations for what were, after all, only statements of logic, but I feel I ought to address myself briefly to a few of your correspondents who don't possess sufficient clarity of thought to see the obvious.

Firstly, and specifically to David Bingham, you're absolutely right to point out that homosexuals are not necessarily biologically flawed humans--I had in mind people who were born with a hormone imbalance, or who felt they were "born in the wrong body", and who could have corrective treatment for that flaw.

To take up John Lindley's challenge, yes I do deplore the use of the word "red" in the context of Communism, as much as I deplore mongrelization of language generally. I do not accept that the word 'gay' is in common use in this country, nor should it be; I cannot see any reason why the word homosexual should be avoided, but I will point out that the word that is commonly used in this coutry is 'queer'. I think that the word 'gay' was introduced by homosexuals in an attempt to persuade people to stop using the denigratory term of 'queer'.

The first paragraph of Gerald Midgley's letter did not surprise me -- I found it irrelevant and I concluded that Gerald missed the point I was making. I do concede the existence of psychological or other conditioning, whilst at the same time I acknowledge the possibility for rehabilitation. Theo Clarke's letter read rather more into mine than was there and therefore made much of his argument pointless; however I will take issue with him on the role of women in society. It is a fact that in general women have smaller brains than men, and it is also a fact that in general women are weaker than men. Without giving a biology lesson, I will just say that there are many physical differences between men and women, such as the fact that a woman's pelvis is specifically designed to facilitate childbirth, and those differences are there to ensure the continuation of the species, whether women like it or not. If you don't like it, complain to God, not me. As for Theo's pointless remark that there have been matriarchal societies in the dim and distant past, the question is, how long did they last, and why did they fail?

Now to the man himself. I am surprised at the wealth of meaning that Alan Wright read into my letter, particularly in view of the fact that I intended my letter to be a dispassionate one, and I felt that I had largely succeeded. Alan's premise that I am making criticisms from a position of sexual uncertainty is as inherently false as the argument that people who criticise blacks do so from a feeling of inferiority --and as such seeks to dodge the issue. I do not intend to discuss my sexual proclivities with you or anybody else, but I assure you that I rest secure in the knowledge of my own sexual identity.

If it's any comfort at all I have long accepted that I am effeminate, in the generally accepted context of the word; although I do not accept that as an accurate definition of my character I understand that that is how many people see me. It doesn't bother me any more than it did being called a "filthy hippy" or a "mod", or anything else that's been thrown at me in the past. I think that if you truly know yourself then you hold a position of strength that cannot be overcome. Incidentally, "I" haven't given a new meaning to the words bent, fruit, pansy etc. I admit to using the word queer as the habit was deeply ingrained before I ever knew there was such a word as homosexual, but I certainly didn't give it its accepted meaning. If by some trillion-to-one chance it was my great-grandfather, then I apologise on his behalf. Briefly I think that homosexuals generally are overstating their case in stating that they are legislated against and that their civil rights are being eroded; it is certainly an offense to practise homosexuality in public --but that equally applies to heterosexuals. Please don't mistake prejudice for active suppression.

As a general aside, my thanks to Dave Harwood, Chris Ash, Kathleen Glancy and Mike Cruden for their own contributions on the subject.

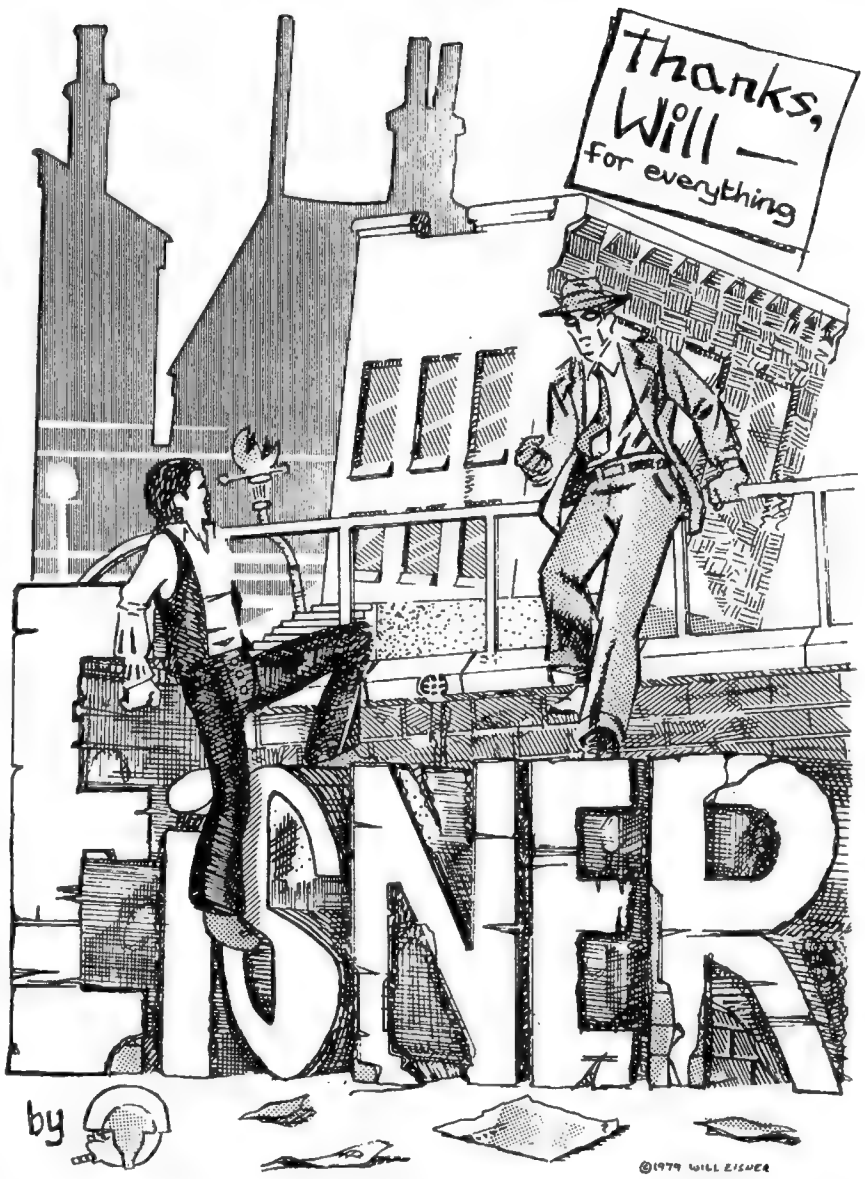
Turning now to a different topic, I have noticed lately that more and more people are writing to fanzines complaining of the 'Big Name Fan' syndrome. For those who don't already know, BNF was a term first used by DC Comics in their lettercols in the early 60s, and was applied initially to people like Jerry Bails and Roy Thomas and latterly to people like Paul Gambaccini, who were all prolific letter-writers. As a joke I once got Richard Burton to put BNF after my name in a CMN lettercol to see if anybody remembered the term, and obviously many do.

In the original sense that term would only apply these days to people like Maureen James and Martin Lock, but I don't think they are quite the target that some people seem to have in mind. Fans themselves, certainly those I've mentioned and many more that I could think of, do not distance themselves from each other nor act in an aloof manner towards anybody. That seems to leave only the dealers and the artists/professionals. Dealers are a motley bunch in many ways and although I think it's difficult to combine being a dealer with being a fan, some do manage it. But if a dealer is simply that, and not an active fan at all (active in the sense of being a regular contributor to, or publisher of, fanzines), then he can hardly be a Big Name Fan.

So what about professionals? If the complaint is that they are inaccessible to fans, is that such a crime? As it happens most artists etc are among the nicest people I know, and are generally willing to pass the time of day with fans, but if, say, an artist takes his wife to a Comicon for a leisurely browse round the stalls, or if a publisher like Dez Skinn is talking business with a writer or an artist, should he make himself available to all and sundry, or is he not entitled to the same privacy that we each expect for ourselves? I suspect the main 'complaint' is that the same names always seem to be popping up in fanzines and at conventions, and if that is so, there is a simple remedy. Write! Write a letter, a review, an article; produce some artwork. If you are good enough, you'll be published; if you're not, then practise till you are.

The whole beauty of the fanzine game is that anyone can play, and it is their very diversity which makes them fresh and exciting. I look forward to seeing something from all of you in the near future (no, not that, Maureen!).

Finally, a word of thanks to Mike C. for allowing me the rare privelege of an uninterrupted letter.



Mike Gold

I can't tell you how much I enjoyed Howard's column. Those years--1957 through 1967--were my first ten years as an involved comics reader, and the events Howard chronicled were nostalgia-filled for me. In those days new comics were not a dime a dozen, nor were they heralded in advance in other comics. You can't imagine the awe I experienced (as did most of my friends) when I stumbled across the first issue of Simon and Kirby's The Fly in 1959--I had never been aware of Jack Kirby before, and those two-page spreads were mind-boggling. I vividly remember the first appearance of Adam Strange and Green Lantern (I searched the newsstands for weeks looking for a copy of the first GL Showcase appearance after picking up the second the day it came out). Whereas I found the debut of Supergirl something of a non-event after the first couple of stories (any new superhero character was entertaining for at least that long), when Weisinger started running those multi-part Supergirl stories I was hooked. Mort did that years before Marvel...

I think Howard missed one important event, the debut in 1958 of Bizarro in Superboy comics. Tons of continuity lines started with that story -- which I think was the first "book-lengther" in Superboy.

When Fantastic Four #1 came out in September 1961 (cover-dated November; it came out the second week of the month, I recall) I was just beginning to lose interest in comics. Batman and Blackhawk had become mindless space opera strips, totally out of character for either feature; The Fly had turkeyed out after Simon and Kirby left, and The Flash would have become very boring (and very redundant) if not for that "Flash of Two Worlds" groundbreaker. But Fantastic Four #1 brought back that sense of wonder...and opened a whole new world of comics storytelling.

Magnus Robot Fighter, Dr Strange, Adam Strange--I doubt if these characters would succeed if launched today -- they weren't super-heroes. /(No? So what were they?)/

Julie Schwartz' total revitalization of Batman and Robin, the unexpected launching of Tower Comics, the re-introduction of Spider-Man and the Hulk, Dick Giordano's innovative work at Charlton and later at DC...that period Howard outlined was the most creative period--by far--comics have ever experienced.

The piece on Power Comics was also quite interesting...as a young fan, I was quite interested by the U.K. reprints in those days (as I am once again in the new-format Marvel reprints). I think I still have a copy of the 1968 Fantastic Annual somewhere in my collection. I was sorry to hear Marvel U.K. is as insane as Marvel U.S... /(this in response to a letter in which I'd mentioned that Richard Burton had left Dez's Bullpen, moving to I.P.C. -ML)/ ...particularly in light of my having a favourable reaction to the first three issues of Hulk Comic. I also enjoyed the first issue of Tornado--it reminds me of those great, innovative days Howard was writing about, when a book didn't have to be super-hero or super-formula to be good. Honest, straightforward storytelling with interesting plots that get right to the heart of the 12 year old -- the little bugger that lurks in the hearts of most of us.

The cover to Bem-23 was fantastic--Brian wouldn't be interested in selling it to a Judge Dredd freak living some 3000 miles west, would he? /(You're too late, Mike; very, very kindly Brian has allowed me to keep that piece of work, which now has pride of place in my collection of original artwork! -ML)/

Roger Lyon

As a 'novice' to fandom and returning to the world of comics after a gap of over ten years, I really feel a bit unknowledgeable but I'm trying to catch up. No help at all in this is your columnist Kathleen Glancy, whose writings (or should that be 'writhings') just make me want to go to bed -- and sleep it off. I'm sorry, I just can't figure it out at all. I'd better watch out, actually, as she can't be all that far away from me. While we're on women (and why not?), I did enjoy the letters from Maureen James; very witty and interesting, and a bit more, shall I say...feminine? /(With that last remark you show yourself to be a braver, or foolisher, man than what I am. Welcome to Reaction.)/

The review columns in recent issues were interesting as well, and good too was 'Made In Britain'. I'm very sad at the way Marvel U.K. comics have gone downhill; as someone who came back to comics partly by the UK weeklies, I'm really appalled at the way they've been made even more juvenile. The quality of the paper is on a level with DANDY and BEANO. So, sadly, I have ceased buying these--and judging by the piles of HULK COMIC in the shops so have others, I can't see that running many issues. Anyway, personally I'm hoping for a return to the old format, although I can't see it, the way Mr Skinn seems to be directing operations. Talking of which the last issue of HoH has yet to appear ...more lost causes.

John Lindley

The DC implosion, as Mike Gold tells us, has been a big boost for the D.C. finances. No wonder Marvel are following suit. The Marvel implosion will boost sales of both companies, with fewer comics, and better production values will abound -- compare DC COMICS PRESENTS with something like THE JOKER from 1975/1976.

Yes, after initial misgivings I'm in favour of the reductions.

Switching now to the new British Marvel weeklies, it seems as though Marvel has decided if they couldn't beat 'em to join 'em, and produce a British-style comic.

Surprisingly, the reduced artwork gives a more detailed look; Infantino and John Buscema look really good. The disappearance of those poorly drawn linking splash pages produced for British Marvel has been a boon, and judging from the covers of the March 21st issues, there's a big boost in that direction too. Godzilla, Dracula, Sub-Mariner, Nova, Skull... there's a greater variety, and with the limited life of those strips, no doubt Devil Dinosaur, unseen in GB, is in the wings.

The new Hulk title excites me, especially with Bolton's efforts, which I think equal those of Berni Wrightson. Funny both artists have achieved fame doing horror, Bolton in HOUSE OF HAMMER, and both have tackled the Hulk. /(Surely the Hulk, especially in the "Hulk TV comics for the kiddies" incarnation, demanded the flashiness of a Trimpe, not the subtlety of a Wrightson or Bolton.)/

Nightraven is a bit derivative, anyone disagree? And Nick Fury hasn't grabbed me yet, ditto Black Knight. The Ant-Man probably launches a new version of the character, where he becomes involved with new hokum. Moving to RAMPAGE, what about the "missing" stories of the old X-Men? If Dez Skinn is reading--what about those Smith and Adams issues?

Mind you--Iron Man and Captain America I don't mind missing, they always struck me as very very American, and of little interest to the UK reader.

Anyway, the message is that comics are on their way back, both sales & quality-wise, and Bem grows in stature each issue too. Suddenly, spring is in the air.

I thought Cat Yronwode was a lady--he/she talks about "an indefinable air of condescension towards women", and says "I find that most male comics fans are lonely men who have both a fear and a desire to see women in fandom and in comics." Yet you, Mike, answer Cat as a he. Does or does not Cat stand for Catherine? Can I have a NO-PRIZE? /(Maybe. No. Gee, I feel silly. Sorry, Cat.)/

James Van Hise

Although I'm coming in on the middle of this controversy begun by Alan Wright over the Chris Ash cartoon, I think I can follow everything from the letters in this issue. I find it quite fascinating. Alan mentions that no comic artist or writer has ever "come out". This isn't true. Shortly before his death, Vaughn Bodé came out and admitted to being actively bi-sexual. This event is preserved in an article Vaughn wrote in MEDIASCENE #15, and it's still in print from Steranko's Supergraphics.

Kathleen Glancy is way off target when she says that minorities have to put up with being laughed at. Comedian Bill Dana, whose characterization of Mexicans, José Jimenez, was wildly popular in the sixties, was forced to discontinue this character due to pressure from Mexican-American groups. I cannot think of anywhere, in the U.S. at any rate, where any racial group can be made fun of with impunity. You may recall that a couple of years ago Secretary of Agriculture Earl Butz told a racial joke to someone on a train and it was overheard and reported in the press, whereupon Butz was forced to resign! Billy Carter's recent antics and Jewish slurs have brought him under an unending amount of attack, and his credibility as a human being has been all but destroyed. Since when does believing in equality mean putting up with being laughed at? What Alan objects to are stereotypes and slurs, something which one would hope is dying out among intelligent people in this culture.

Chris Ash seems to overlook the fact that a stereotype is a slur. When one has to fall back on a stereotype for an easy laugh, then one's imagination is probably pretty lacking in creativity. I might point to Monty Python who, rather than using old stereotypes, created new stereotypes of nonexistent characters which were far more effective. /(So new stereotypes are acceptable, but old ones aren't??)/

I wonder what Kathleen Glancy would think if Chris Ash had used a stereotype woman? The difference in our culture is that people know that a stereotype woman isn't any sort of mirror of reality, whereas too many people believe the stereotype homosexual to be a realistic portrayal, and those that laugh at the portrayal laugh in derision. /(When I laugh at a portrayal, e.g. Archie Bunker or Alf Garnett, I laugh at the script-writer's wit and the actor's skill, not at the character per se.)/ To many people gays don't have rights, nor do they deserve them. They believe the stereotype, and even defend it. Anita Bryant's successes have come from the spread of fear, not facts. John Briggs used the same methods and almost succeeded. I feel I can speak accurately of both situations as I was living in Dade County Florida at the time of Anita's crusade and when I moved to California I was greeted with the impending vote on Proposition 6 (which would have required the firing of any teacher known to be a homosexual. Thankfully the California voters realized the impossibility of someone's defending themselves from such a charge, should it be levelled by an enemy who wants them out for other reasons.).

I have enclosed an article which you can feel free to reprint in BEM. It originally appeared in RBCC #143. I received a couple of very positive responses to the article, but most people who saw it were strangely silent. I wish I received as many interesting letters to the RBCC as you receive to Bem. /(Thanks, James--the short article will appear in Bem later this year. And of course I'd better say, for the record, that James Van Hise is the editor & publisher of THE ROCKET'S BLAST COMICOLLECTOR, a very well-produced American fanzine available at all the best specialist comics shops. -ML)/

Jeff Brewer

Taking up Kathleen Glancy's go at Wolverine, I must say that there seems to be an over-reaction to something which in many other comics is taken as a matter of course. In most comic genres--especially war--people are killed without any outcry. It seems peculiar to the superhero comic that killing is almost taboo. Buildings can be demolished, cars wrecked, the land destroyed--but deliberate killing has to be avoided, especially by the super-powered people. Perhaps Gerber's elf in "Defenders" was trying to point out that while superheroes belt each other with steel girders and don't even bruise, ordinary people die for the stupidest of reasons -- and what could be more stupid than being shot by an elf?

Concerning war comics, Ruan Lanihorne's reply to Pete Scott hints at some of the unplumbed depths behind the forty years of World War II, the sixty-five years of World War I, and so on. The main thing the war comics appear to perpetuate is the race hatred, which is fine when the readers are expected to want to go out and join the front line, but is something of an anachronism when the propaganda and the war are over with. So the sons & grandsons of the war heroes grow up with the same insults to sling at the "enemy". This violence of speech can lead to the violence of a physical nature -- look at how football "supporters" slanging matches can end in physical confrontations.

As a final sort of comment on violence in the comic media, could I draw a couple of comparisons between the treatment of violence in the British product and the US product. It seems that although the British comics are aimed unashamedly at children and the American comics at a wider spectrum of ages, the British revel in scenes of 'life based' violence, whereas the Americans go in for fantasy violence. In the British comics lots of people get shot, blown up, squashed by monsters, crushed in cars, maimed by animals etc, and often the incidents are quite graphically portrayed. Most of the American comics are a lot tamer, with all their heroes and villains back on their feet at the end of the story (excepting of course the almost compulsory beheading of some unfortunate soul each month in "Savage Sword"). I admit I don't actually buy war comics, but you don't need to with the British product--there are war stories in most of the British comics, and of course the "specialist" war comics add to the blitzkrieg on the newsagents' shelves--every week, not monthly as in the USA.

The thing which amuses me the most is how the British Marvel reprints censor the "naughty bits" in some of the stories so that our kiddies are protected -- whilst the violence of most British comics is accepted as something quite innocent and is allowed into their homes without any concern on the part of those who publish or sell them.

Last year in a Dorset seaside resort I picked up a copy of "Heavy Metal" in a little newsagents. Nothing unusual about that, the only thing was it was on the bottom shelf of the display rack keeping company with the kiddies' comics which are placed there so the youngsters can reach them. I must say something about the attitude most people in this country have when they think of comics: if it's got lots of pictures and word balloons, it's for kids. /(The worrying aspect of violence in any media, but particularly in comics, is that it may foster an acceptance of, or even a liking for, violence in real life. It's an element of a sick British society that we censor sex, but accept violence. In Sweden, it's the other way round. I know whose values I more admire. Britain is also the only country in Europe to allow corporal punishment in schools. Those Victorians have a hell of a lot to answer for.)/

Ken Moore

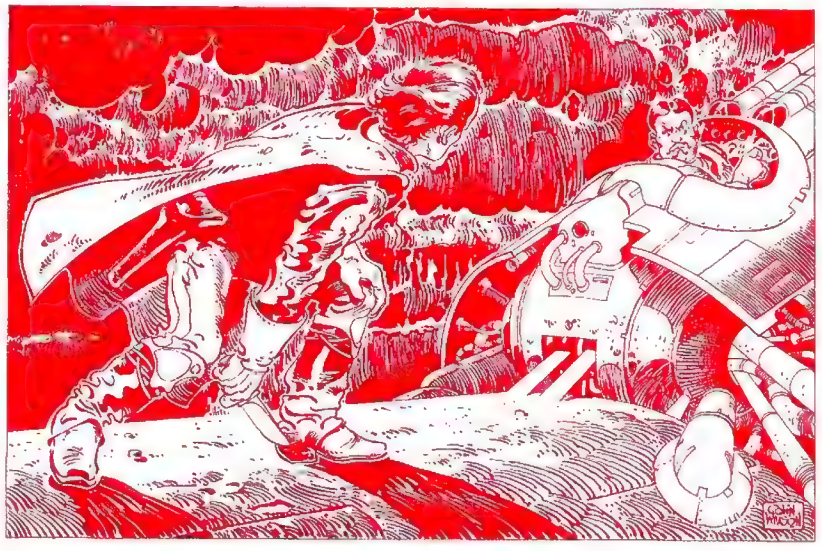
I really liked Katholicity this time; Kathleen at last wrote an edition of her column that I liked (wow). A nice sensible 'un, and I agreed with her about Pietro's brainwashing by Moondragon, that pompous baldy cow.

The new BLACK PANTHER book by Hannigan, Bingham and Day really is incredibly good. Ed really has brought the book well away from the laughable Kirby version, which was so dire. The art on the book is tremendous; Jerry Bingham is really a fine penciller and, coupled with Gene Day's great inking, it's been a long time since the Panther was so well drawn. Looking at the news section I see that Chaykin is going to draw 5 issues of MICRONAUTS. God, but that really is such a step down from the dynamic art of Mike Golden! I was really displeased to see Nebres inking Tom Sutton's art on DR STRANGE. It really is a pity that Tom can't ink his own pencils, as he is so much better than Nebres doing so. Annoying also is Mike Ploog not drawing the colour Super Specials featuring WEIRDWORLD, as I'm sure that John Buscema will not prove to be any sort of substitute.

Back to the contents of Bem; I didn't like either of Chris Ash's articles. They just seemed a waste of space. I, and quite a few other readers will no doubt dispute that "DC have produced little of note during the past decade". What about DEADMAN, AQUAMAN, the Conway/Newton NEW GODS, Conway CHALLENGERS, Wein/Wrightson SWAMP THING, Englehart/Gerber/Rogers/Golden MR MIRACLE, Englehart/Rogers BATMAN, etc?

The strips on page 4 were excellent, but Gleitzman was ECHH! Sigh, I hope, will return. I always considered it the best feature in Bem, and if it goes, then Bem will be much the worse without it.

There's something I'd like to say about Craig Russell's work for Mike Friedrich.



He is doing all of these supposedly wonderful stories based on operas etc, and I just want to put my spoke in and say that I think that 30% of it is tripe! Especially the PARSIFAL work, in which so many of the human figures are like cardboard cut-outs. His art has become incredibly ornate, but he seems to have forgotten how to draw people. A blurb on a free-sheet for a book he illustrated states that the book features "the FANTASTIC ART OF P. CRAIG RUSSELL"; "and only one artist in the world could capture (Jack London's) unique imagery, the incredible P. Craig Russell, who awed science fiction enthusiasts all across America with his fine art for the Marvel Comics illustrated WAR OF THE WORLDS series! Craig's ornate and imaginatively original art makes this book a true treasure of wonder and beauty." CRAP! That hype really annoyed me! One thing I really hate is an artist's rep being built on past glories, and I especially hate it in this case as examples of the illustrations for the book are shown and are absolutely awful, and in no way could they even be said to be fit to stand in the shadow of Russell's Killraven art, which was excellent, with the exception of the last issue. /(I thought his Parsifal art was quite dreadful too, but the unreadable story didn't help.)/

Recently I was struck by the dreaded disease known as AITOFC--Am I Too Old For Comics. I'm still unsure as to whether I am going to continue collecting. I've been shying away from buying any back issues for quite some time, preferring instead to buy science fiction paper and hardbacks. There's no real danger of me selling off my collection in the near future, or anything like that--it's just that I'm unsure what to do in the long term. Can anyone please help me? /(Stick to the quality material, and there's nothing to be ashamed of. If you've been enjoying comics for some time, I don't see how you can fail to enjoy publications like Marvel Preview (Blackmark, Star Lord), Savage Sword, most warrens, Heavy Metals, as well as the more conventional X-Men, and Avengers.)/

Something rather happier now; I see Nige is back! Yes, Nige (NPE) Edwards is back in active fandom! I'm not going to slag him, but rather say welcome back, Nige! The at-times-morbid sods like myself need some humour in our fanzines, and you're the guy who provides it.

Phil Greenaway

Brian Bolland's cover rendering of Judge Dredd was a pleasant surprise. How did Martin manage to swindle it off Brian, I wonder? /(Perhaps by a threat to expose him.)/ Personally, I didn't like the art on Judge Dredd when Brian first handled the strip as I preferred Mike McMahon's zanier style (which I thought was more suitable). His style has grown on me over a period of time, though...and he's certainly one of the more accomplished comic artists around in Britain today.

As for 2000 A.D. itself. Well. It is amongst the more enjoyable comics that I read these days. I'm especially pleased to see that most of the artists and writers have got a pretty obvious sense of humour. They don't take the stories that they write too seriously, as the scripts are rife with famous catch phrases, clichés, and characters from the films and TV. I suppose that Judge Dredd is the obvious example of what I mean. Just read any episode, and I'm sure you'll come across quite a number of funny lines or ludicrous situations.

All the strips in Bem were really enjoyable, especially Gleitzman. The only one that I disliked was Ultra-Man. Usually I'm pretty good at understanding and appreciating symbolism...but the meanings hidden in this strip were a little obscure. My own interpretation of it went something along the lines of: "the blandness of, perhaps excessive nature of Life being unable to compensate for the inevitability of death." Do you have any ideas of the strip's possible meaning, Mike? /(I just thought it reinforced the old adage: you are what you eat.)/

Reading the news section, I was amazed to see so many cancellations at Marvel occuring at the same time. I won't miss The Black Panther, Invaders or Godzilla, which were either clichéd, over-written or childish, with inadequate art. The same applies to Kid Colt and the Rawhide Kid; the only western titles that I've ever liked are Jonah Hex (one of the few consistently good titles on the market these days) and Scalphunter--both of which are DC comics. Aside: How is it that DC seem to have a monopoly on producing good war and western titles? As for the superhero reprints--well, they won't be missed. That only leaves Tomb of Dracula, Red Sonja, Captain Marvel, Ms Marvel, and Nova. These are all personal favourites of mine, to varying degrees, either because of their art, story or both. They'll be missed. /(I think that echoes most people's feelings, with the possible exception of Ms Marvel.)/

Sigh's back, is it? Hmmmm -- isn't it amazing how Keith can write about virtually nothing yet make it interesting. /(Well, I agree with the first part of that sentence.)/ Incidentally, isn't Kw the one who dislikes Hunt Emerson's art? That was a master-stroke of sadism having an Emerson illo accompanying Sign in Bem 23, Martin. /(Cackle, cackle!)/

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REVIEW SECTION

WORLD OF KRYPTON #1 (July)
"The Jor-El Story" by Paul Kupperberg, Howard Chaykin & Murphy Anderson

Very nice.

(What? You want more than that...?)

Okay then. The art's very pleasant (I wasn't sure Chaykin and Anderson would mix, but they do), the continuity's excellent (it must have been quite a strain weaving together all the threads from previous stories -- kudos to Paul K & ENB for the effort), and the writing was pretty nearly believable. Certainly nowhere near the disaster it could have been...

(What's that? "Nowhere near the disaster it could have been" isn't the same as "very nice"? It is if you're a continuity freak like me...)

(Anyway, I enjoyed the Superman film, so I'm feeling generously disposed at present...) -K. Williams

A strange but not particularly unpleasant wave of nostalgia washed over me as I read this premiere issue edited by DC's unsurpassed King of Kontinuity, E. Nelson Bridwell. The history of Krypton is not altogether unfamiliar to me from countless Superman stories and the original "World of Krypton" back-up series, so none of this tale is new to me, and the feeling is akin to re-reading one's own diary, or browsing through the family photo album.

Kupperberg's script is competent and interesting, while Chaykin's pencils are completely dominated by Anderson's strong inks; with an old style, low-key, unsensational cover plus 23 pages of story, it's like a trip into the sixties.

This month's point to ponder: isn't it ironic that Jor-El and Lara finally get their own comic when they've both been dead for decades? Will Marvel quickly follow suit with "The Amazing Peter Parker's Uncle Ben", or "Bucky, the ex-Boy Wonder"?

Is death the new comics craze? -NPE

TOMB OF DRACULA #70 (August)
"Lords of the Undead" by Marv Wolfman, Gene Colan & Tom Palmer

And so ends the best comic of the 1970s, with a double-length issue which ties up most of the plot-threads of the past three years. All the creative team are in top form, especially some stunning visuals by Gene & Tom; and if the story is somewhat lacking in shock plot-twists, it still provides the most gripping comic of this year. Who knows if Dracula will reappear as a black-and-white as planned, but if nothing eventually emerges, ToD 70 is a fitting epitaph for the Count's comics career. R.I.P. -Barry K. Winetrobe

JONAH HEX #25 (June)
"The Widow Maker" by Michael Fleisher, Dick Ayers & Romeo Tanghal

"He was a hero to some, a villain to others...and wherever he rode people spoke his name in whispers. He had no friends, this Jonah Hex, but he did have two companions: one was death itself...the other, the acrid smell of gunsmoke..."

Yes, and me. Jonah Hex is a character that fascinates me: due to his inherent nobility, and his external ugliness and brutality. When I picked up this issue I said: "Oh God--they couldn't...they would not dare." They did though, relegating a so-so artist like Dick Ayers to deal with the art chores. He was okay on Kamandi, evoking the essential fantasy type setting that the strip required, but he fails to visualise the grittily realistic western atmosphere that other artists have succeeded in doing in the past. I predict that E.R. Cruz and Luis Dominguez will succeed where Ayers has failed though, as soon as their work is used on the strip.

The story, basically, concerns Jonah's seeking vengeance on a gang of (obvious) bad guys (they're called the "Black Hat" gang, y'see). His desire for revenge is heightened after they have killed a friend of his; a pioneering newspaper man called Nate Ashin. The influences on this story are obvious; they are the mainstay plots in the western genre, from "Bonanza" to a Clint Eastwood film.

All this is pretty standard fare, up to the last couple of pages where Jonah's "justified" vengeance mingles with his innate viciousness. He strings the leader of the "Black Hat" gang up, mercilessly. This is no consolation for Nate Ashin's wife though, and she is quick to point out the whole pointlessness of the episode, the grief it's caused, the sense of loss. Jonah can say nothing. He can just ride off into the sunset (as the woman predicted), like the big hero he is. He can't change what he is, he knows that; but he can think about what he's done and its consequences, none the less.

The last page makes a profound comment about what 'life' and 'death' in comics should really be like, as opposed to how they are presented for the most part. It also points out the abject futility of violence, and this is a theme which is prevelant in a lot of Michael Fleisher's work. For that, I salute him.

-Phil Greenaway

MACHINE MAN #10 (August)
"Renewal" by Wolfman & Ditko

Why is Marv Wolfman listed as writer/editor when it was obviously Jack Kirby? Yes, folks, it's sarcasm time!

I expected much better from Marv on seeing his name on the credits, not a plodding, cliché-ridden script which reads like an old Hulk comic from the early sixties. Machine Man warbles on about "finding himself" ((I just looked round, and by Jove, there I was! -K. Swilliams)) and humanity does the old bit about "hating those who are different", plus the other hoary plot devices. Machine Man, is he man, monster, or hackneyed stereotype?

With Ditko's bland artwork and Wolfman's worm-eaten words, it reminds me overmuch of one of those sub-standard Atlas comics from a few years back.

Yes, more sarcasm... -Nige P. Edwards

DOCTOR STRANGE #36 (August)
"The Man Who Knew Stephen Sanders" by Stern, Macchio, Colan & Green

The August crop gives us not only the end of Colan's Drac but also the re-start of his Doc Strange. His art here is a lot less ambitious than on the ToD finale, and it's all the better for that: unless Gene holds himself in check he's liable to trip over himself, and the results can be chaotic if not ludicrous. Mind you, I wish Tom Sutton (a favourite of mine) had been allowed to establish himself on the book, after one brilliant solo stint (#30) and great work on most issues since then.

Ralph Macchio scripts this pot-boiler well, with a neat line in atmospheric verbiage, but it would've been nice if Roger Stern could have scripted his own plot; he's been guiding Doc along as well as possible for months, only to be ousted again, along with Macchio, next issue. Perhaps some fans think I'm complaining needlessly, with an old master like Colan back and Chris Claremont scripting from the issue after next, but a bi-monthly can't afford to be erratic, and between

them Stern and Sutton were just beginning to establish a nice, different kind of atmosphere in the book--over a year's work down the drain. Let's hope the illustrious Colan/Claremont combo make up for the lost time. -Geoff Lindsey

SUPERBOY & THE LEGION #251 (May)
"The Man Who Destroyed The Universe" by Steve Apollo, Paul Levitz & Dave Hunt

Jim Starlin fans have to be rather eagle-eyed nowadays if they are to spot and track down his work. Seemingly unwilling to devote himself to a regular series, he tends to limit himself to the odd one-offs (like the recent Ghost Rider story, and a previous LSH issue) which are sprung upon us without (much) warning. "Story & Layouts" in this case are, by the way, accredited to one 'Steve Apollo'--readers of Star*Reach will no doubt realise the derivation of that pseudonym. It would appear that Dave Hunt has done more here than just an inking job, for some panels and figures are too 'heavy' or 'thick', and there is a general loss of detail. The layouts are, however, instantly recognisable as those of Starlin, as is the monster of the piece, a...uh...gold-skinned titan called...uh...Omega. (Dear me, what would we do without a working knowledge of bits of the Greek alphabet?) The story? Well, various members of the brightly-costumed Legion charge round, throw rocks, destroy buildings, or go mad. Quite nicely paced though, I must say that. Plus, we have one of those morals-boosting speeches at the end that actually seemed justifiable in the context, and realistic in expression. All in all, a better than average issue of S/LSH, I suppose. I quite liked it, really, y'know... -Simon Booth

STAR FIGHTERS #1 (May-June) $1.25
"Star Fighters" by Ken Landgraf, Gil & Simons (9pp); "The Killer Cat of Zerena" by Landgraf, Josef Rubinstein & Divers Hands (5pp); and "Debra Starr" by Ken Landgraf & Jack Abel (6pp)

A bold effort here from Ken Landgraf's "Landgraphics Publications" -- a tabloid-size newspaper-type comic with, inside a 3-colour cover pencilled by Landgraf, & finished by Neal Adams, three SF stories scripted and pencilled by Ken. The lead strip is a serial of a group of interstellar mercenaries fighting an alien invasion fleet, while the other two yarns are "Future Shock" type quickies, relying on twisty tails and, with "Debra Starr", a groan-inducing play on words.

Efficient, attractive art, though with too much mechanical tone added for my taste, and quite a good production -- but why the newspaper size? With less than 7 panels per page on average, the art does not need it, and I'd have preferred more pages, and more stories, in the standard comicbook format. -Ruan Lanihorne

CE3K – IN RETROSPECT

by Pete Scott

There are a couple of brief, tantalizing scenes in Steven Spielberg's film 'Jaws'. Shot at night, they show the boat 'Orca' out at sea. Suddenly, in the background, something streaks across the starry sky. The first time this happens, the viewer is left with the impression that Spielberg's camera has, quite by chance, captured the flight of an actual meteor. But an exactly similar scene takes place a little later: Something is seen to flash across the icy blackness of deep space...

These scenes clearly anticipate the theme of Spielberg's next film the wonderful 'Close Encounters of the Third Kind'. The actual plot of CE3K is simple enough and need not be rehashed here. The spiritual odyssey of protagonist Roy Neary (played by Richard Dreyfuss) must be familiar to just about every fantasy fan in the country anyway. What I intend to do here is run quickly through the film and point out a number of things I personally found interesting or impressive -- OK?

One of the first intimations of UFO activity is the blacking-out of a large geographical area. It's well known that UFO sometimes do play hob with our sources of power, and many cultists still believe that they somehow caused America's famous 'big blackout' of November 1965. Interestingly, actor Stuart Whitman claims that during the blackout he saw and communicated with two UFO. They delivered one of their usual warnings, using certain recognizable stock phrases... "Earthlings...might disrupt the balance of the universe," Whitman alleges he was told. "The blackout was just a demonstration of their power, and they...could stop our whole planet from functioning." Just as Neary's home is plunged into darkness, his children are seen to be watching a scene from (I think) 'The Ten Commandments' on TV. This is a film about Moses, who, of course, climbed to the top of a mountain -- Mount Sinai-- and there spoke with God...

Later on in CE3K, one of Neary's children is shown watching a Daffy Duck cartoon on TV. Daffy is engaged in fighting it out with a puny yet warlike 'Martian' who flies around in a craft called 'Martian Maggot'. This scene forms a neat comment on the ordinary man in the street's dumb, flippant attitude to the whole idea that non-terrestrial life-forms may exist. Could it be, I wonder, that Spielberg had in mind the fact that certain authorities once considered commissioning the Disney studios to produce a series of cartoons debunking the UFO phenomenon when he conceived this scene?

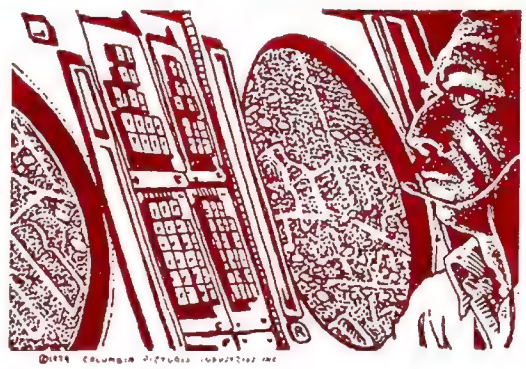
The same TV set is also used as a dramatic device later still in the film, when Neary sees his first glimpse of (the significantly named?) Devil's Tower on it.

Neary's encounter with the 3 cruising UFO out on the highway is masterful. The sense of stillness and wonder created as the soft indistinct craft whoosh by is perfect. The three main UFO are followed, incidentally, by a small red light, correctly identified by David Gerrold as one of a number of subliminal references to Disney: it is "the last chipmunk, the littlest mouse, the clumsiest dwarf...who catches our hearts with his efforts to keep up."

Neary's wife is portrayed as such an insensitive, unsympathetic harridan that you can't help wondering why the hell he ever married her in the first place. She is obviously supposed to exemplify the reaction of society at large to the UFO phenomenon. After leaving her Neary makes his way to Devil's Tower, where the film's mind-blowing final 40 or so minutes take place. I don't suppose Spielberg chose Devil's Tower as a location for the sake of any fashionable phallic significance. He was probably just referring to the fact that in ancient times men always went up into high places to meet with their gods.

Anyway, those final 40 minutes are really something. The scene of a single point of light flashing over the Tower, as prefigured by the aforementioned shots in 'Jaws'; the scenes of the individual UFO swooping and tumbling through the sky like so many rich mandalas; the breath-taking first appearance of the phantasmagoric 'mother-ship' -- all are very profound images, guaranteed to touch a responsive chord in virtually every viewer.

The UFOnauts themselves are classic large-headed, long-fingered, dwarf-like entities as reported by hundreds of UFO witnesses over the last 30 years or so. Encounters with such creatures are not all that unusual. In fact they are quite commonplace. The religious text read by the minister shortly before Neary and the others board the mother-ship clearly identifies Spielberg's UFOnauts as 'angels' sent by 'God', whoever or whatever God may or may not be. The final impression one is left with is that, angels or not, the little entities come from outer space. The phrase "Einstein was right," for instance, refers to Relative Albert's theory that the faster an object moves through space the slower it moves through time, hence the non-aged appearance of the bewildered abductees as they emerge from the mother-ship.



But the notion that UFO come from deep space is actually quite naive, and in this respect Spielberg virtually seems to have taken the easy way out. Many scientists who've studied the problem agree that the idea of actual "nuts 'n' bolts" craft coming here from other planets or galaxies is a very unsatisfactory interpretation of the evidence. French astrophysicist Dr Jaques Vallee recently ventured the opinion that "the things we call Unidentified Flying Objects are neither objects nor flying. They can dematerialize, as some recent photographs show, and they violate the laws of motion as we know them..." Vallee has also been known to call UFO "three-dimensional holograms with mass;" probably a reasonably accurate summing up of their true nature. The UFO phenomenon seems to be largely of a psychical nature, and in opting for so simplistic an explanation as the extra-terrestrial hypothesis Spielberg does seem to have dodged the issue somewhat.

Nevertheless, CE3K is a film to marvel at, and, come to think of it, Spielberg is deserving of a certain respect for having the courage to tackle such a difficult subject in the first place. Overall, the film is a classic, and shouldn't be missed by anyone who calls himself a fantasy fan. I understand that Spielberg may be reissuing it in a slightly different form sometime, probably with some new footage added to it. Plus, there's definitely to be a sequel, which Spielberg, though it's uncertain whether he'll direct it, will be writing and producing. Whether or not either of these two efforts will match up to the original remains to be seen.

fan-things
BY ED SALLIS

Where else to start than with the return of PANELOLOGIST, "fanzine with big mouth" as it calls itself on page one of ≠10, the spring '79 issue? 8 A4 pages, with the customary lashings of tiny print; 15 pence from George Barnett,

and if George hasn't libelled anyone this time, Panny ≠11 should be out in July. Lots of news and comment, a J.H. Szostek strip, 4 pages of slightly dated but still engrossing letters, and the opinionated, authoritative fanzine review column, "Fan-Scenes", by Kevin Curran--or not, as George admits that Kev was in fact him in disguise! Sometimes I get the feeling I <u>am</u> just a pen-name of Emlock, though a few pints usually helps dispel the mood...

A more ambitious production is WORKIN' KLASS SUPER HERO ≠1, with 40 A4 pages for only 35p by post from Jolly Martian Publications.

The ad in Bem-23 will have given you some idea of the art involved; Glenn Fabry has a style like unto that of Moebius, while John Mould and Steve Brown, though variable, have some excellent work here too. Only four pages of text here--but top notch stuff. For the give-away price of 35p, this zine, obviously put together as a labour of love, is quite irresistable...particularly as a premiere issue the quality here is astounding!

Of course, slick litho printing with the emphasis on art isn't the only way to produce a first-rate fanzine; although it has a moody "Tribute to Dracula" cover by Guy Lawley and a full-page "What If Marlon Brando Really Was Jor-El" spoof pencilled by Dave Hornsby, the emphasis in VERTIGO ≠5 is much more on the written material 18p by post from Barry K. Winetrobe,

--or 3 issues for 50p ; there's "A Look Back at Drac" by Barry, reviews of comics and fanzines, Marv Wolfman on ToD, Mo James on "The Ladies of Dracula", letters, a spoof of toy characters in comics, and the traditional "more" -- all good stuff, well worth 18p of any fan's money. I gather Vertigo ≠6 will be an extra-large summer special, probably 25p --so a 50p 3-issue subscription would be a good investment, 'nuff said?

MAGUS ≠3 20p for 10 A4 pages from Phil Greenaway,

is quite a good read too; the informal organisation of the thing's no disadvantage, except when "Axa, An Appreciation" vanishes in mid-sentence without even a writer credit. The Richard Burton interview of Mike Conroy concluded this time, while a report on last year's Comicon by Maureen James is embellished with rather murky photos of G. Perez, D. McGregor, N. Edwards, and M. Lock. Les Chester offers an "Opinion"; K. Williams continues his expatiation on "Living In An Unstable Universe"; and the art side is handled by Paul Jay (some of his funny ho-ho "Hairy Mary" strips), John Mould, Bob Watkins, Paul Rose, and Mike Church. An informal, lively zine; Phil says that the July issue will be almost all strips, which will be a shame, as he has assembled a good cast of writers; I hope Keith Williams' series finds a new home, as I've found it to be particularly fascinating -- unlike some of the writers in the lettercol, strangely enough!

FANDOM ≠7 (16 A5 pages, free for an s.a.e. from Eddie Walsh,

is as usual a very handy blend of sales list and fanzine, with news, repros, reviews, and a wide range of magazines for sale. A good service, in fact, with free want ads for customers, standing orders for Marvels, DCs etc, and other useful stuff.

APOCALYPSE ≠5 25p for 24 A4 pages from Dave Hornsby,

has a full-colour cover, and also a full-colour centre-spread by Dave of the X-Men that's very suitable for sticking on your wall; Dave's 4-page barbarian strip is nicely done, complete with "(heh heh)" ending, but the star of the show is a 7-page Nick Neocleous strip originally prepared for Kidz Stuff ≠2 a couple of years back -- sword 'n' sorcery of a high calibre, only slightly let down by cramped, under-punctuated lettering.

DOOMZINE ≠2 25p plus a stamp from Jonny White,

is, like Apocalypse, required reading for X-Men fans; Martin S. Forrest contributes an illustrated history of the current team, as well as lots more excellent art on other pages...the response to his Kate Bush illo can only be WOW! Add a good lettercol, art by Pete Scott, Dave Hornsby & Billy Mulraney, part two of the E.R.B. series by G. Pugh, and other bits, and you get a good 28 A5 pages. The checklist of the new X-Men's stories is very useful.

FRANK BELLAMY'S GARTH EPISODE

BRIDE OF JENGHIS KHAN

All 90 strips included, reduced in size but reproduction excellent. Did not appear in either of the Garth annuals. Print run limited to 400, with no further print run planned at the present time.

65 pence plus 10 pence postage and packing. Please make cheques and postal orders payable to John Dakin

ANDURIL ≠7 is a fantasy magazine, and a very well produced one at that; it costs £1.75 for 52 A4 pages from John Martin,

and it's worth it. Russ Nicholson and David Lloyd are the main artists, and both are in good form; it's interesting in particular to see how versatile Russ is, especially if you tend to identify him with Comics Unlimited and now Bem; David Lloyd, a regular artist for Panelologist, is no slouch either. On the text side are pro-quality stories by Raul Garcia Capella (in the age of Conan) and Gordon Larkin, articles on L. Frank Baum, Sleuths & Spooks, and (by Tanith Lee) "Herowhine", plus the usual departments. It's good to see a British publication that can meet head-on the USA fantasy zines, with their Steve Fabian covers and Robert E. Howard revivals; I just hope it has good sales in the UK, I'm sure it does well in America. By the way, editor John Martin is the chap who runs the type-setting service that Em the editor will be using for Bem in future.

And next in the head is a letter from Jonny Kurzman; contrary to previous ads SUPER ADVENTURE STORIES ≠3 will be A4 size with 48 pages for 50p from Mike Gibas.

And Gary Millidge reports that AMON SPEK, as advertised in FT ≠35, has run into problems, so ≠2 is delayed. ≠1, as advertised, <u>is</u> available from Gary

for 35p. It specialises in "the more unusual side of sf & fantasy". And here's a circular from Gerald Midgley; THE ALTERNATIVE HEADMASTER'S BULLETIN is in need of material for the poetry, comix, prose and tv sections, contact him before July 1st
Kent if you want to be involved. Strips should be in black ink on A4 paper; the finished zine should have about 26 pages, and sell for a mere 10p. And MORPHIOUS is returning--≠9 is being prepared by Robert Fleming.

And "Magical Mystery Store" is a new shop in the basement of 24 North John Street, Liverpool 2; it seems to be master-minded by ace Zephyr publisher Trevor L. Hughes.

WORLDS ≠11 30p for 24 A5 pages, from Mrak Finch,

has an all-star cast of writers and artists, including John Matthews, Bob Watkins, Graham Bleathman, Martin Lock, Dave Hornsby, Maureen James, Mark Castro, and Brian Bonhomme. Topics covered are the Superman movie, Supermarionation, and the sf chronological review. It's strange that a magazine much more interested in tv and films seems to draw most of its audience from comics fandom -- but then, perhaps there isn't a ready-made fandom for tv and films, outside the specialised Dr Who, Prisoner, Star Wars, and similar clubs. It's a zine that's steadily getting better and better -- and how many of the zines in this column have reached double figures, after all? I sometimes wish I saw less first issues, and more twentieth ones...

Behind a simple but eye-catching cover is BIRTHDAY PRESENTS ≠1 25p from Carl

for 20 A5 pages); it is, unfortunately, not too well printed, but with quite a few comics for sale, and a well done article on how to be a superbeing, that actually got me day-dreaming on the subject. Not that I'd be any good as a Dweller of the Universe or Solarman --keeping a secret identity has always struck me as being much too difficult, and with my name I'd definitely have to keep away from swamp !

Book for
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COMICON

COMICON '79

Provisional Programme Outline

Friday, August 31 :

Guests and attendees can book in throughout the day and familiarise themselves with the hotel.

The first official event will be an Evening Reception, which you are invited to attend in Fancy Dress. The Reception will give you the opportunity to mingle with U.K., U.S. and European fans and pros.

Fancy Dress Costumes will be judged and prizes presented.

In the late evening a special film will be shown in the Metropole's luxury cinema.

Saturday, September 1 :

DEALER ROOM opens at 10.00 a.m. where you'll find hundreds of thousands of comics from the distant past to the latest airfreight imports, plus art-work, posters, books, portfolios, science fiction, films, slides, stills, calendars and much, much more offered by dealers from both sides of the Atlantic.

ART DISPLAYS including a special show of STERANKO's original pages from the classic Captain America 113.

ARTISTS AT WORK

INSTANT AUCTION

6.30 p.m. Guest of Honour : STERANKO

Spectacular Films in the Luxury Cinema

Sunday, September 2 :

Dealer Room
Panels and discussions
Art Auction
Special Events
Films

Rooms at the Metropole are normally £27 per person plus.....but a special rate has been negotiated for Comicon Attendees, just £12 per night per person to include vat, service charges and breakfast.
Reductions for children are available.

All rooms contain private bathroom, colour tv, & air conditioning.

For full details of all room rates etc send SAE

Dealers from both sides of the Atlantic are coming-

USA and UK Dealers have booked table space at Comicon 79.

REGISTRATION

3 day tickets £5.00
2 day tickets £3.50
reductions for children and under fives free

for full details send SAE.

COMICON 79-- The Venue.

Wholly purpose built for conventions and shows just a few years ago
The National Exhibition Centre in Birmingham is fast becoming the most sought after exhibition complex in Europe.

The Hotel Metropole is part of the NEC Complex, 7 miles south of Birmingham adjacent to the International Airport, Intercity Rail Station, and with its own specially marked turnoff on the M6.
The Metropole, venue for Comicon 79 has full conference facilities, a luxury cinema, a pub, a coffee shop, Restaurant, grill, sauna, hairdressers and squash courts. The Hotel situated alongside Pendigo Lake is set, along with the rest of the NEC in the middle of quiet unspoiled countryside.

½ cost period return rail fare available to everyone (in the UK, except N. Ireland) booking in advance.

COMICON

Announcing the eleventh annual British Comic Art Convention

COMICON '79

Aug 31, Sept 1, & 2, 1979

at

BIRMINGHAM METROPOLE, National Exhibition Centre, BIRMINGHAM, England.

Guest of Honour -
innovator, publisher and artist extraordinaire -

Steranko

Other U.S. guests include ;

PAUL LEVITZ: Editorial Co-ordinator of D.C. Comics, New York.

JOE STATON : an artist whose work includes E.MAN, The Justice Society and Legion of Super Heroes.

LEN WEIN: writer (Swamp Thing, Batman etc)

Other U.S. Guests tentatively scheduled include MARSHALL ROGERS, TERRY AUSTIN, and HOWARD CHAYKIN. Confirmation of U.S. visitors and a full list of U.K. guests will be given in subsequent bulletins.

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The fantasy event of the year - don't miss it.

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COMICON 79, Biytoo Books,
Plains Road, Gt. Totham,
Maldon, Essex, England.

Overseas fans, please send your name & address for details to be airmailed.

Talking of Solarman, there's an illo by Russ Nicholson of that fan/superhero in THE COMIC REVIEW ≠7 30p for 24 A5 pages from Nige Balloch,

for The Society of Comics Enthusiasts -- and for details of that worthy group, send Nige an s.a.e. , along with a re-telling of his origin by his creator, Bill W. Ryan--anyone remember the full story from the Fantasy Unlimited Annual of a few years ago? I gather that a full new adventure of the Fan of Fire (that phrase copyright (c) 1979 by Edward M. Sallis; all rights reserved) will be in ≠8, due out very soon now. But the high spots of CR ≠7 are Paul Jay's "Anthony" strip, SF reviews by Mark Wordwriter, the legends of Thor by Joy Farren, "Dealers' Diary", as told to Nige Edwards, fanzine reviews by Phil Greenaway, and four pages of letters. Nice one, Maureen!

And where would we be without good old reliable COMIC MEDIA NEWS INTERNATIONAL? Well, we'll soon find out, as the latest issue, ≠39 45p by post for 28 A4 pages from Richard Burton,

announces that it is the last regular issue -- though CMNI 40 will appear later this year, and an s.a.e. to Richard will ensure you get a chance to order a copy when it's ready. So, that's a treat to look forward to, as it should be something special -- and Richard hopes to continue in the fan publishing arena, though his sub-editing on Tornado and his free-lance scripting doesn't leave him time for a CMNI-type commitment now. As ever, CMNI 39 is excellent reading--need I describe the contents? Some editors and zines you can trust never to disappoint, and Richard and CMNI come in that category. Even if CMNI Update is enlarged, the fanzine scene just won't be the same...

In the current pick-a-back fashion, CMNI 39 brought with it FANTASY FORUM for May 16 A5 pages from Mike Conroy,

this is a well-produced letterzine that Mike puts together for his regular mail order customers, so an s.a.e. to Mike ought to bring you a copy, along with his latest sales lists. An excellent cover drawn by "Capricorn", good letters with competent answers by Mike, and even a page of news at the back, makes this a zine well worth seeking out.

But what of Scotland, you ask? Well, WHAT'S UP ≠2 35p for 28 A5 pages from The Scottish Space Society,

is a space fanzine, with news of NASA, the solar system, and rocketeers -- if you're interested in the fact side of space exploration, you may wish to investigate. THE FRIENDS OF KILGORE TROUT MAGAZINE ≠4 (30p for 24 A5 pages from Sandy Brown at the same address) is an sf fanzine with this time an interview with Ian Watson and much pleasant jocularity, inside an irresistably sexy cover of a siren of space--at least, wearing a holster, a space helmet, and a sweet expression, what else could she be? Sandy is giving up the editorship of this zine after this issue, to allow him time to act as Membership Secretary for the BSFA, the British Science Fiction Association --so if you want to join that august body, he's the man to contact. £1.00 (payable to the BSFA) will get you a sample mailing, as described in Fantasy Trader ≠37; if you then decide to join, that £1.00 is deductable from the full annual subscription rate, £5.00.

ARGENT VOID PRESS is advertised on page 13; the first issue has 20 A5 pages, and is indeed in places just a bit outrageous. Not a bad start, as fanzines come...

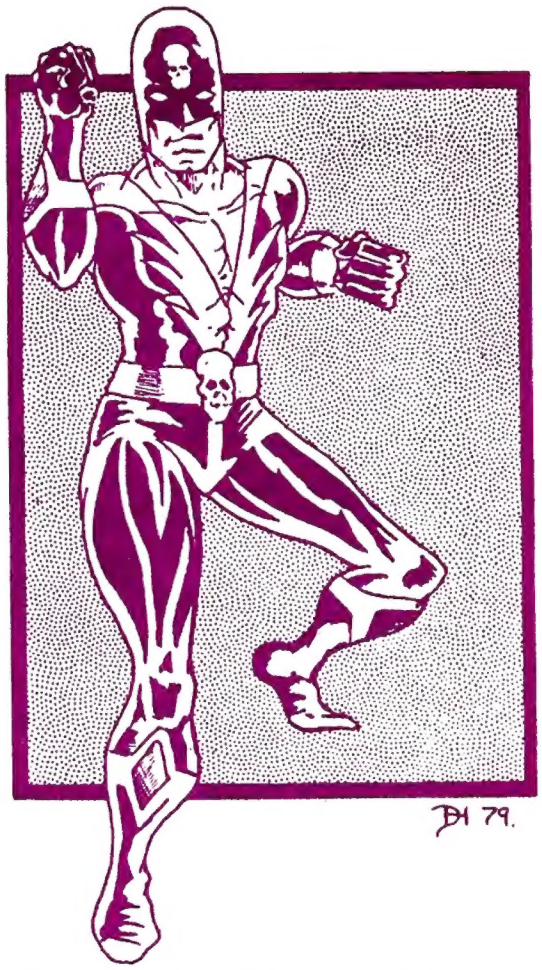
And what of COMICS UNLIMITED? Last time I asked Alan Austin, he reported CU ≠50 was one-third finished, so the Great Moment cannot be far away now; until then, how about volume one of THE COMICOLLECTOR'S COMPANION & PRICE GUIDE, featuring all Marvel comics from FF ≠1 on, except for Black Panther, with their worth. FF ≠1 is £200 in mint condition; Conan ≠1 £30, Silver Surfer ≠1 £9, Spider-Man ≠1 £120, Giant-Size X-Men ≠1 £8, Howard the Duck ≠1 £2...all this data, and as much else as it takes to fill 48 A5 pages, can be yours for £1 (the value of Captain Marvel ≠3, Strange Tales ≠150, or Spider-Man ≠125 in mint condition) from Alan Austin, 47 Hesperus Crescent, Millwall, London E14 9AB.

GRAPHIC ODYSSEY ≠1 45p for 24 A4 pages from Meirion Jones,

by fitting two A5 pages side by side onto an A4 page, gets a 19-page strip by Meirion and his American co-editor, Alan Cross, a 3-pager by Von Thurman, and a 16-pager written and drawn by Meirion into its 24 pages. Good, innovative strips they are, too, which have had a lot of enthusiasm and thought put into them.

OGRE ≠2 15p for 16 A5 pages from Colin Gould,

has gone out free to



Graphic Sense subscribers, I gather, even though GS ≠5 has been delayed until July; I can't say I approve of the idea behind "A Beginners Guide to Comic Investment", but I suppose we should all know what goes on. Letters, fiction, an article on the Human Fly, words of gloom concerning the cents/pence comics pricing split, and art by Luke Rainford (including "nage three" treatment for Hulk), Alex Evans, and Avram and Nick Buchanan. All good stuff...and I notice a plug for KA-POW, scheduled to feature Luke Rainford among others, at 30p from Rick Catilli.

And here's FANSHEET 4, with 4 A4 sheets for 10p from Stephen Bailey,

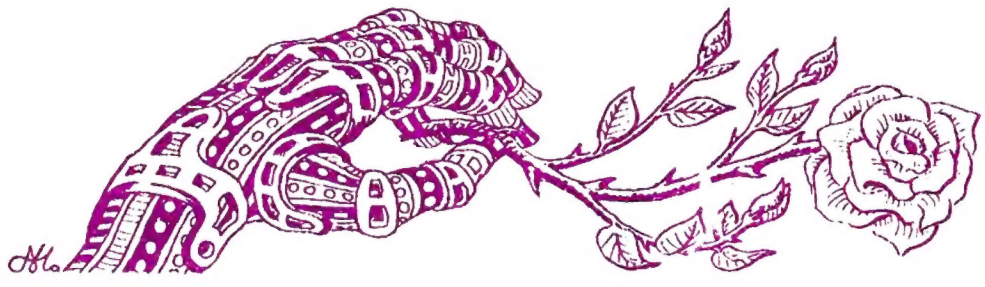
it's progressing well, from a single sheet towards being a real fanzine, though there's still room for improvement. And for that, Stephen needs more people along for the ride -- as do we all!

But to finish with I really must give the Comicon (London) 1979 folks a plug--the Comicon 79 event is fully covered in the ad on page 24, but not everyone, I guess, believes in supporting fanzines by paid advertising. Comicon (London) 1979 takes place on 11th and 12th August at the Rembrandt Hotel, Thurloe Place, South Kensington, opposite the Victoria & Albert Museum; advance admission tickets cost £2 plus an s.a.e. sent to G. Day,

or admission on the day is £2.50. The special guest of honour is Jim Starlin--Dez Skinn and Paul Neary are also expected, and I gather Dez is using his influence to get some more Marvel men over. If you have any queries, you can ring 01-593 5793 and ask for Ian. It should be a good week-end! -Ed Sallis

ART CREDITS:

Tim Benion: 16; Brian Bolland: 2 (R); Mark Castro: 27 (strip); Rob Davis: 26; Hunt Emerson: 12 (top); Dave Hornsby: 25 (R), 27 (L); Alan Hunter: 25 (bottom); Martin Longley: 11; Mike Matthews: 14, 23; Harry McAvinchey: 13; Terry Moore: 4; Nick Neocleous: 15; Russ Nicholson: 19 (L), 21, 22; Martin Noone: 2 (L); Luke Rainford: 12 (centre); Pete Scott: 18; Superswipe: 27 (R); Bob Watkins: 25 (L); G. Whittaker: 17; Colin Wilson: 19 (R).



YOU NEVER THOUGHT THE DAY WOULD HAPPEN—THE DAY YOUR HOME WORLD IS INVADED BY HOSTILE BEINGS FROM OUTER SPACE! FROM WHENCE HAVE THEY COME, YOU CRY AS YOUR DEFENSES ARE ANNIHILATED BY THEIR SAVAGE WEAPONS! FROM WHICH DARK WORLD COME...

THE ALIENS?

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YOUR TALLEST BUILDINGS ARE BATTERED INTO RUBBLE BY HUGE WAR MACHINES!

I'LL BE GLAD WHEN WE HAVE FINISHED COLONISING THIS SECTOR, COMMANDER!

I KNOW WHAT YOU MEAN, I THINK ALL THE MEN...

BY DAY'S END YOUR PROUD CITIES LIE IN RUINS, AND THE SURVIVORS OF THE ON-SLAUGHT ARE SHACKLED TO SERVE AS SLAVES TO THE *ALIEN CONQUERORS!*

ARE LOOKING FORWARD TO GETTING BACK HOME TO *EARTH!*

FIN

WORLDS OF EMLAK

Mainly July cover-dated comics this time --I do have the August ones, but I've not had the chance to read them yet!

MICRONAUTS #7 is a fine instalment of the saga Bill Mantlo and Michael Golden have worked up, with the added bonus of Man-Thing as guest-star to anchor this epic securely into the Marvel Universe. Manny is handled well--and I defy anyone to remain unchilled by the final frame of the story! And August brings a tale Bill has entitled "Earth Wars", as Baron Karza stalks Cape Canaveral. Luckily, the Enigma Force creates a hero to oppose him...So, all I need say is don't miss 'em, yes?

AVENGERS #185, by David Michelinie, John Byrne & Dan Green from a plot by Steven Grant & Mark Gruenwald, begins Wanda and Pietro's quest for their past, with some beautiful art, spooky happenings, and the return of a rather unexpected mystic as guest-star. And the first 5 pages show the rest of the team --they alone would be worth the price of admission, in my opinion!

X-MEN #123, on the other hand, is that rarity, a poor issue of this title -- but let's trust Chris, John and Terry, and assume that this re-run of Team-Up #66 merely sets up the scene for lift-off next month. As it is poor Spidey is abandoned in a phone-booth on page 11 (the seventh story page), and the X-Men spend their time getting trapped by Arcade in his "Murder World"--it's an entertaining 17 pages, but it isn't a story on its own, by any means.

Barry Winetrobe covers the final issue of Tomb of Drac in the Review Section--but I've been left GODZILLA #24 to comment on, in which ol' radioactive breath walks off into the sunset (nicely depicted on the cover by Herb Trimpe and editor Al Milgrom), as the Toho/Marvel agreement ends. Doug Moench, helped on most issues by Happy Herb and Dan Green, did a good job on this title; while it was never one of my favourite books, it was always well produced, and enjoyable, with some good guests well-handled in the main. Goodbye, big green monster...

And as a last Marvel, how about MARVEL TWO-IN-ONE #54? The Project Pegasus saga, begun in #53, certainly looks extremely interesting--and I don't just mean because of the Byrne/Sinnott art. And this issue is something of a first for team-up mags, as you'll find out when you read it; I just hope Benjy catches up with the people responsible for what happens! The guest star is Deathlok in this instalment.

SUPERMAN #337 has a very sneaky twist to it, which sneaks up on you on page 16; so that's the reason! I can't remember this plot being used here before, though a similar gimmick was used in a Lois Lane story once -- kudos to Len Wein, and also of course to Curt Swan & Frank Chiaramonte.

"The Last Great Switcheroo" in JLA 168 is engrossing too, as the latest plot of the Secret Society of Super-Villains comes to its climax; Gerry Conway is doing some good work on the JLA.

ADVENTURE #464 has at last the Deadman story, now 23 pages, originally scheduled for SHOWCASE #104; it has been worth the wait. Gerry Conway & Len Wein wrote it, and Jim Aparo drew it--I enjoyed it. The Flash tale by Bates, Heck & Giella, and Wonder Woman's adventure by Conway, Delbo & Joe Giella are ordinary, but Aquaman (by Bob Rozakis, Don Newton & Bob Smith) is up to its usual standard, and the 8-page JSA short (from Levitz and Staton) featuring Wildcat looks as if it is of major importance to the future of the group. It's a fine change of pace too.

JONAH HEX #26, by Mike Fleisher & E.R. Cruz, is pretty grim; a good story, but any tale of a cholera epidemic can't be light-hearted, I guess. The only criticism I have is of DC's old failing, the cover that misleads--it shows Jonah holding the whole community to ransom for the serum he has, which is not the case at all. Over the years this has become a title for comics connoisseurs; if any prejudice you have against western characters like Kid Colt has stopped you from trying Jonah's title, please think again...

WARLORD #23, still inked I'm afraid by Vince Colletta, is a fable with a moral; at first the situation seems reminiscent of the far-future segment of "The Time Machine", particularly the film version; but Morgan is too intent on playing the hero to look at things more closely.

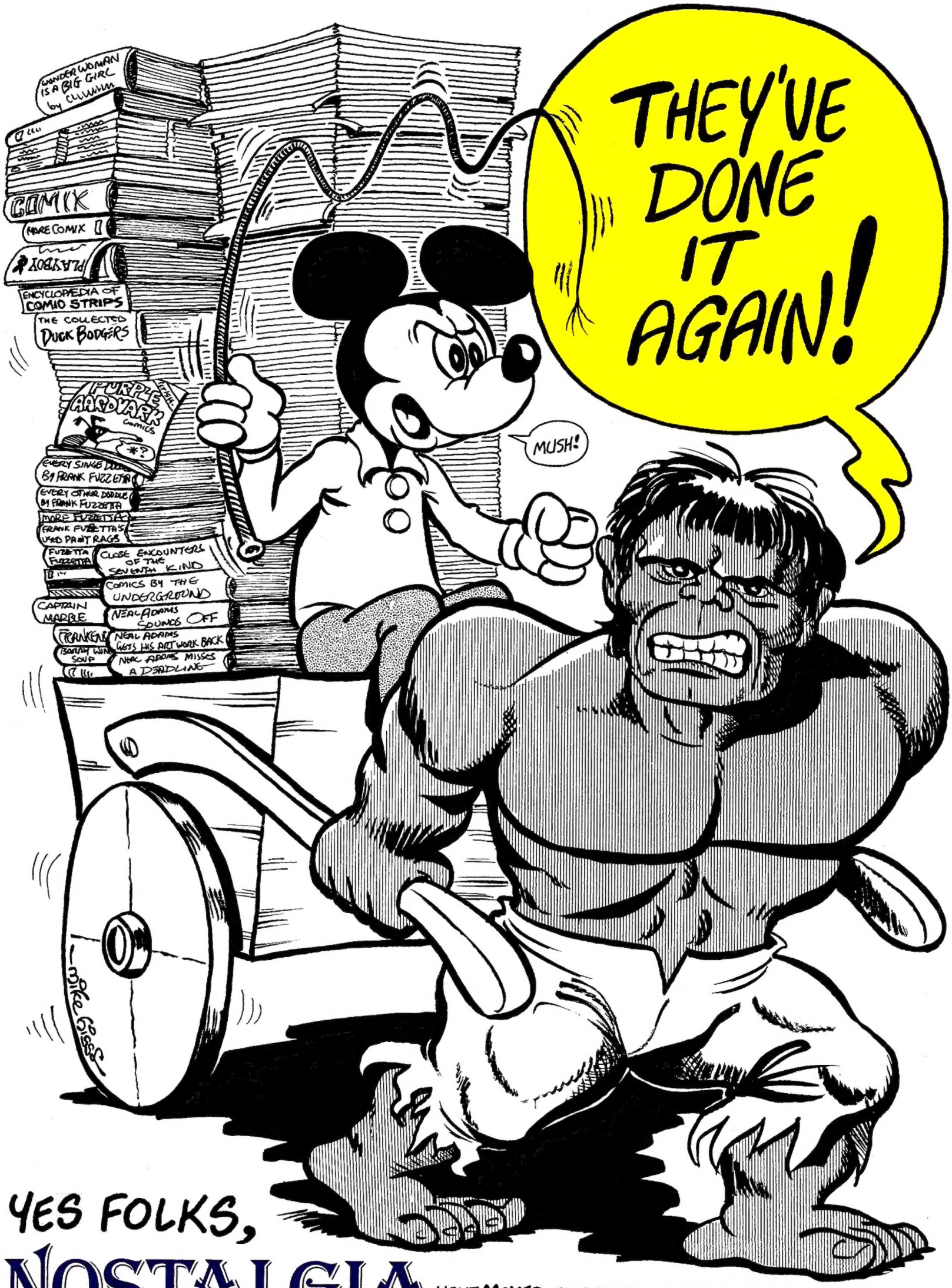
And for a final DC, GREEN LANTERN #118 continues the romance between GL and Kari Limbo, and concludes the antics of the Crumbler and Professor Ojo--just as well, as any reminder (such as OjO) of that absolute turkey of a book, Denny O'Neil's KUNG FU FIGHTER, is surely unwise!

You'll see I've carefully left space for further comments; to start with, let me commend to your attention the Aardvark-Vanaheim presentation CEREBUS THE AARDVARK --#9 (April) is the latest issue I've got to hand, in which a grey, furry critter less than three feet tall (and marginally similar to the Daily Mail's Flook) strives to make his fortune in the Hyborian Age, or its reasonable facsimile. This issue is rather grimmer than some--if you go for helpless fits of laughter, look for the Red Sophia and Elrod issues--but I still found it quite fascinating. You get a different slant on barbarian comics by following this grey, determined little aardvark through his various exploits; I think those of you who haven't picked up his exploits at the proverbial good specialist comics & fantasy shop could do a lot worse than investigate!

And another excellent series I enjoy is ELFQUEST, from Wendy and Richard Pini; this series, featuring some delightfully heroic, down-to-earth elves, is also well worth seeking out. It's only reached #4 so far, but Wendy's art, and the joint scripting, is coming along nicely, with more vitality and invention than you'll find in a dozen Marvel or DC books.

Series like these aren't undergrounds, and they aren't fanzines; I rate them more highly than Star*Reach, for all its big name professional artists, and wish them well. If they're following any example, it must be The First Kingdom -- but more about that particular series in Bem-26!

Oh, subscribers--your Eagle Award forms should be enclosed. Please send them back to me as soon as possible, so that I can repeat last year's Bem analysis. -ML



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